

A RAJAH'S HONOUR

BY

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AUTHOR OF

“All that Matters”



CECIL PALMER

FORTY-NINE

CHANDOS

STREET

W C.2.

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*The characters, names and places in
this book are entirely fictitious*

A RAJAH'S HONOUR

PREFACE

Those who know the East, and are prepared to allow authors, whose sole object is to entertain, a little latitude, will not accuse me of trespassing far beyond the boundaries of that license

Others will no doubt consider certain episodes unlikely, improbable or incredible—according to the mood they are in at the time.

The mentality of the sailor's mother, who said to her son: "I believe in them mountains of sugar and rivers of rum, Jack, else where do they come from? but I can't swallow them flying fishes!" has caused many an author a bitter sigh

I ask my readers, and my critics, to believe that in a vast country, like India, where the police are a mere handful in comparison with the enormous population of 318,000,000, and where people are buried or burnt without a medical certificate within a few hours after death, and where the British Government is frequently powerless to administer justice, many incredible things may and do happen. In support of this contention I have taken the liberty of giving verbatim extracts from the "Daily Express" of January 17th and 18th, 1924.

SANCTUARY FOR A MURDERER

GUILE OF THE EAST

'Ajab, the notorious leader of the murder gang on the North West Frontier, is journeying to Kabul, as a guest of the Amir

Eastern guile has defeated the ends of Western justice. Ajab, who is not an Afghan subject, gave

himself up to the Amir's troops, and claimed "bast." By the law and custom of the East a fugitive is immune from harm if he claims "bast" in the house or territory of a fellow-Moslem. •

' Lord Curzon's speech on Tuesday shows that nothing more can be expected from the Amir. "We shall expect the Afghan Government scrupulously to adhere to their undertaking," said Lord Curzon, "because it is not consistent with the laws of hospitality that prevail in these regions that the Afghan Government will consent to give these men up."

Ajab and his gang were responsible for the murders, among others, of Mrs. Ellis, Captain and Mrs. Watts, Col. and Mrs. Ffoulkes.

ALLAHABAD, Thursday, January 17th.

' It is felt that the British Government has again been hoodwinked by the Amir, who is evidently playing a deep game. The murderers, it is thought, should be handed over to the British, as they are tribesmen dwelling on the British side of the Frontier. Otherwise there is every possibility of their escape to continue their career of murder and the kidnapping of white women, which is their openly professed object.'

The Rajah of Kohajulia exists only in my imagination, and perhaps on this account the reader will look with a lenient eye upon his faults.

For myself, I am in love with him, with his orthodoxy, his unyielding fanaticism, his versatility, his predilection for misquoting our proverbs, and last but not least with his smooth, suave voice; because he represents to me an epitome of racial impressions gathered in the East.

P. W.

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A RAJAH'S HONOUR

CHAPTER I

“I SAY, you chaps, the monsoon's broken at Bombay!”

The voice from the verandah, emanating from the throat of a young subaltern and addressed to no one in particular, had an instantaneous effect.

The tennis players on the hard-courts suddenly found that in the fast fading light of an Indian twilight further play was impossible. The thirsty souls in the bar forgot their half-slaked thirst. The verandah echoed to the sound of feet. A crowd gathered round the notice board; even ardent Bridge players temporarily forgot the fascination of the game in their anxiety to verify the news. For a moment or two the crowd surged, and then suddenly the buzzing of exclamation merged into hurrahs. The monsoon was at hand! The telegram from the Meteorological Office, pinned to the club notice board, set all doubts at rest.

It had been a particularly trying hot-weather,

for the monsoon was long overdue, and the baked compound of the Ghurumpur club looked like a sun-killed desert. The thermometer, day after day, had registered over 115 degrees in the shade for more than six weeks, but at last relief was in sight ; rain was coming !

With the waning of the sun the strong west wind, which had raged throughout the afternoon, had dropped to a breeze ; but it was a breeze which still licked the heat from the soil and scorched the face as though it had passed over molten metal. Thank God ! The sun had sunk unchallenged for the last time, and no dry, scorching wind would follow in its wake till another set of seasons had run its course

The District Judge turned his back on the verandah and with measured steps, as became his official position, sought the chabutra.*

"Is it true, Tommy ?" queried Mrs. Sinclair.

"Oh, quite ! There's a telegram to say the monsoon's broken at Bombay, and besides, look at those clouds."

Mr. Tomlinson waved his hand skywards in a manner which expressed that his knowledge of the weather was more to be relied on than the telegram ; then seating himself in a long-armed chair his hand touched the hot wood and he remembered his thirst.

"Will anyone have a drink ? Will you, Mrs. Sinclair ?" He noted the affirmative nod and addressed others ; some would and some wouldn't.

* A slightly raised masonry platform

• “Aren’t the Garfields due to-day ? I wonder what she’s like !”

“As black as your hat, I bet !” Oldham, a young planter, chuckled as he uttered the remark. It was part of his creed to be outspoken, and he was too thick-skinned to comprehend the difference between tolerance and approval.

“What makes you say that, Mr. Oldham ? She’s as English as you are and strikingly young and pretty.”

Oldham was interested at once. He had heard that the Sinclairs were putting up the Garfields until their own bungalow was ready, and he liked young and pretty women, particularly if they were married. His income did not permit of a joint household.

“Oh, they’ve come ?”

“They arrived by the mail last night.” Mrs. Sinclair eyed Oldham suspiciously as she announced the fact. “They are coming to the club, we’ve sent the tonga* back for them.”

Oldham looked at his crushed tennis shirt and dust-spattered flannel trousers for a moment and then rising, sauntered off in the direction of the changing room. He felt he would look better for a bath and change. He laid great store on first impressions.

“I wish Mr. Oldham wouldn’t always go out of his way to cast reflections on Major Garfield,” said Mrs. Forsythe.

* An Indian conveyance, resembling a low seated dog-cart, surmounted by a canvas hood

"I think you take his banter too seriously. Besides, Garfield's rather reticent about his family, you know."

"That may be so, Mr. Tomlinson. But he did tell my husband on one occasion that he's of Spanish descent."

A titter of laughter greeted the last remark.

Mackenzie, the District Board Engineer, gave a loud guffaw. "Oh, same old tale! They've all Spanish blood in them. What rips those old Spaniards must have been!"

"Oh, but I think you can always tell, Mr. Mackenzie, can't you?" Mrs. Sinclair pleaded.

"Can we! What do we know about Eurasians?—We never come into contact with them, not really. We're sent out here when we're a little over twenty, and by the time we retire we've only just begun to learn what natives and Eurasians really are."

"That's very true, Mackenzie! And when a Eurasian's been brought up and educated in England I fancy he could claim any parentage."

"Oh but, Tommy! Major Garfield's features are quite European."

"My dear Mrs. Sinclair, haven't many natives European features?—What with Parsees, Armenians, Pathans, etc., this country's a mixture of almost every race under the sun."

"Then you think he's a Eurasian, Tommy?" There was a note of reproach in Mrs. Sinclair's voice.

"I don't feel called upon to give any opinion,"

said the District Judge with judicial gravity. "I don't know who his parents are.—I've never met anyone who does. And in such circumstances I preserve an open mind."

"Besides, Mrs. Sinclair," interposed Cosgrave, "look at the way he slings the bat*! Any Babu will tell you he knows the language like a native. And he hasn't the ambition of a European. He's quite content to return to this poky little Station, and I know he refused a transfer to Bombay just before he went on leave. Col. Goodfellow told me so. He shirked the responsibility. A thoroughly native peculiarity."

"I'm not going to argue any more, Mr. Cosgrave," said Mrs. Sinclair resignedly, the while secretly regretting Garfield's reticence and, what she also thought, was his want of ambition. "I like Major Garfield. Both Harry and I would rather have him than any doctor we know. And in the various Stations we've been to we've known many."

Cosgrave, a young Assistant Engineer, hailing from Wigan, was not prepared to be silenced. . . .

"Did you ever know any other doctor give castor oil to cure cholera?"

"Well, it cured you!"

"No, it didn't. I didn't take the beastly stuff! It was my constitution which pulled me through, that and half a bottle of Worcester sauce."

Cosgrave's assertions, much to his chagrin,

Indian language

produced nothing but mirth. Everyone in Ghurumpur knew that his cholera was the result of a rather wet night at the club, and a repast, shared in the early hours of the morning with a young sub., in which a tin of Digby Chicks and a bottle of "Highland Foam, Guaranteed Full Strength,"—both unadvisedly purchased at a discount in the native bazaar*—had played a prominent part.

"Well, I don't think much of a doctor who doesn't believe in his medicines. I've often heard him say that in many cases you can't tell whether they've done any good or not." Cosgrave uttered the challenge provocatively.

"Oh, he does believe in them sometimes," said Mrs. Forsythe, taking up the challenge. "It was his medicine—and pretty big doses too!—which saved my husband's life."

"I thought it was Col. Goodfellow?"

"No, it wasn't, Mrs. Sinclair, and now Goody's dead there's no harm in telling you what really did happen. You know how jealous Goody was of the Indian Medical Service?"

"Army doctors generally are!" murmured Mrs. Sinclair.

"Well, Goody was more than jealous of Major Garfield. Couldn't stand the tar, as he used to say when speaking about him. And when Gerald was so ill I asked him if he couldn't call in Major Garfield for a consultation. He flared up at once, said there was nothing to be gained by it. It was just a case of malaria and nothing

* Native market

more, and nobody could do any more than he was doing."

"Just like old Goody!" interposed Mr. Tomlinson.

"But I wasn't going to take that answer, and I'm sure Gerald would have died if I had. He was raving so, and I could see that if something weren't done and done quickly I was going to be a widow! So I told old Goody straight that if he wouldn't send for Major Garfield I would."

Tomlinson chuckled. "I bet that touched him on the raw!"

"It did! I'll never forget the look he gave me. But he went off like a lamb, for all that. I think he saw how distressed I was. But there wasn't much of a lamb about him when he returned with Major Garfield. He just looked daggers at me, so I bolted into the dressing room and made myself scarce. Presently I heard Goody say, 'Sixty grains of phenacetin? Why, Garfield, it's enough to kill a man! And a cold bath on top of it? It's sheer murder!'

"'It's a case of kill or cure,' Major Garfield retorted. 'No man can stand a temperature of a hundred and eight for long. If it goes on like this he'll be a raving lunatic if he does recover. So I'm going to risk it.'

"That fairly put the wind up Goody! But it gave me confidence. You know when Major Garfield says a thing in that quiet matter-of-fact voice of his it does give one confidence. And I peeped round the door and when I saw him

emptying into a wine glass of water packet after packet of the ten-grain doses of phenacetin, which Goody had ordered to be given every six hours, I felt I wanted to laugh. Nearly got hysterics, I suppose ! ”

“ Poor Mrs. Forsythe ! ” said Mrs. Sinclair feelingly.

“ It must have been the re-action, for I felt somehow he was going to pull Gerald through. And when the last packet had been emptied into the glass I could see that Goody was beside himself with consternation. . . . ‘ Garfield, ’ I heard him whisper hoarsely, ‘ for God’s sake stop this lunacy ! ’ For one second Major Garfield did stop, just to give Goody a look which I think would have silenced anyone, and then he said : ‘ Prop him up ! ’ just as though he were giving instructions to a hospital orderly. Goody, for once in a way, acted like one, and the next instant Major Garfield jerked Gerald’s head backwards. The sudden movement forced his mouth open and the sixty grains of phenacetin were in before you could say ‘ knife. ’ ”

Mrs. Forsythe shuddered at the recollection and after a pause continued :—

“ ‘ Now for the bath, Colonel, ’ he said, and Goody, as though he hadn’t a kick left in him, just did what he was told. And between them, in spite of Gerald’s struggles and the most frightful language I’ve ever heard, they carried him into the bathroom and gradually lowered him into a tub of cold water. ”

"What a terrible ordeal for you!" said Mrs. Sinclair, quite unable to control her feelings.

"I wasn't upset. Major Garfield looked so confident, and gradually Gerald's incessant drivel grew less and after a while stopped altogether. Presently I heard Goody say. . . 'I believe he's going off to sleep,' and Major Garfield said, 'Oh, we're going to pull him through! We'll just keep him here a little longer and give that phenacetin time to work.' Then he gave old Goody another shock. . . 'We'll give him a hypodermic of quinine when we get him back to bed.'

'A hypodermic of quinine?' gasped old Goody. 'Why, I've never heard of such a thing.'

"No more had I until I went through my post-graduate course, and I've since tried it in several acute cases with very good results,' Major Garfield replied, but it didn't seem to remove Goody's anxiety."

"Well, you know he was one of the old school," said Tomlinson, "but a very good sort, Mrs. Forsythe."

"He was. But it was Major Garfield who saved Gerald's life, and I don't think Goody gave him credit for it. He never spoke about it to anyone as far as I know. And when all danger was past and I thanked Major Garfield he just said, in that quiet apologetic voice of his, 'I'd rather you didn't speak about it, Mrs. Forsythe, not to anyone, if you don't mind.' So of course I didn't, but I don't think he'd mind now poor

Goody's dead. And I think it's horrid to hint that he's 'of the country.' I don't believe it and never shall."

Mrs. Forsythe finished her tale to the accompaniment of significant nods, but was so carried away by her defence of Garfield that she failed to grasp their meaning, or to hear the sounds of approaching footsteps. In consequence Major Garfield's voice broke on her ears with disconcerting suddenness.

"A promise is always a promise, Mrs. Forsythe!"

Feeling the guilt of a criminal, more especially because Garfield had ignored those words 'of the country,' when she had expected the reward of the just, Mrs. Forsythe turned with confusion to confront Major Garfield and his bride.

CHAPTER II

MRS. GARFIELD, sensing the electrical atmosphere which her husband's words had produced, took only a perfunctory interest in the introductions that followed.

She, too, had heard the words 'of the country,' and though she could not quite grasp what they implied she was aware that they cast a derogatory reflection on her husband. Consequently her feelings towards the company were somewhat antagonistic.

She had been dreading her first appearance at the club with something like the same dread that she had felt when she first went to school, and the company on the chabutra was not particularly pleasing to her eye. The men seemed blasé and the women were of that age when they are least tolerant of the attractions of youth.

The strangeness of the surroundings, which has an alluring fascination for the tourist, only served to increase her homesickness and dread. She had to live with these strange people in this strange land, not for a month or two, not for

a year or two, but for what, to her young mind, constituted a life-time.

It disconcerted her to think that her husband, the man with whom she had to share this life, was obviously none too popular with the Station. The indifference with which the company received him was quite sufficient evidence of this as far as Vivienne Garfield was concerned. No wonder she felt bewildered! No wonder she felt homesick!

The introductions over, Vivienne, for some time found herself answering innumerable questions, but gradually the conversation veered round to the ordinary every-day gossip of an Indian Station, and, like a schoolgirl, she experienced the ostracism of a newcomer.

It was Mackenzie who lightened her burden. Though bluff of speech and rugged of countenance, he had a particularly sympathetic nature, and he felt Vivienne's position almost as acutely as she felt it herself. In consequence he fired off such a round of questions and appeared so interested in her replies, that gradually she lost her sense of bewilderment and feeling of homesickness.

Her naive remarks, garbed in humour, brought back the recollection of the company to the time when they were newcomers, and in time they found themselves helping Mackenzie and relegating to the background the trivialities and "shop" around which the conversation of an Indian community circles.

• “It’s a regular fraud, isn’t it, Mrs. Garfield?” Mackenzie interposed with a humorous twinkle in his eyes.

“Oh no, there’s no *fraud* about it! There’s no fraud about the heat or the look of the place. I think if I saw a really green blade of grass I’d have hysterics! The only fraud is my husband.” She shot Garfield a sly little look as she fired that dig. “He told me I’d find Ghurumpur as green as England, and *look* at the desert he’s brought me to! He told me I’d notice little difference in the food, but if you showed any respectable English hen the egg I had for breakfast it wouldn’t recognize it. Why, the thing was so small it wouldn’t be highly commended in a pigeon show. I’d like to take an English egg-cup and show it to the hen that produced the monstrosity. It might have some conception then of what was expected of it!”

“But there’s *some* green about the place, your husband isn’t all fraud. The trees are green, aren’t they? And the egg is an egg after all.”

“I’ve finished with the egg, Mr. Mackenzie, but I’ll send my young brother one for his collection! The trees are green, as you say, but they only make this desert more hideous. They remind me of tufts of parsley on a badly warped kitchen table, and I don’t know why they aren’t shrivelled up. The heat in the train this afternoon was as hot and dry as the heat of an oven. Why, I couldn’t put my hand in the water in the wash-hand basin.”

"I don't think your husband's as bad as you paint him. *He's* not the arch-deceiver, it's the rains that have cheated us all. They generally break about the fifth of June. They're a fortnight late this year, but they're coming a last! We'll have rain in the morning and in three or four days' time the whole country will be as green as anything you can imagine."

Mrs. Garfield looked at the sun-baked ground with a sense of the incredible but was unable to voice her thoughts. How could anyone voice their real thoughts in such a country, where you bathed in tubs placed in rooms as large as a suburban drawing room; used a tin mug instead of a sponge, the while lizards, clinging to the wall, stared at you out of black shining eyes which looked weirdly inquisitive against their flesh-coloured, transparent bodies?

It was with trepidation, somewhat resembling fear, that Mrs. Garfield had eyed those lizards as she slipped into her bath. A trepidation which had been increased when one of them suddenly darted in her direction along the wall. It was only the quick realisation that it was not herself but a moth which was the attraction and the cause of the reptile's instantaneous action, which prevented Vivienne from screaming out.

Fear and fascination held her spellbound and still as she watched that uncanny creature devour the moth, head first, with the abandon of a glutton.

How could anyone form clear thoughts, let

alone voice them, after such an experience in the stifling atmosphere of that bathroom, where the hot water in which she had been persuaded to bathe (she would much have preferred cold) gave off no steam. Where the light of the hurricane lantern, set on the top of a masonry curb which encompassed the tub, cast eerie shadows on the walls and ceiling as she moved about. Where the floor, consisting of bare concrete in order to throw into relief any unwelcome intruder, constituted the playing-ground for a score or more of big black ants. Hideous insects, an inch long, with pincer-like mandibles, which she had been told were "quite harmless so long as they weren't trodden on!"

It all came back to her, that, and the few tears she had shed in surroundings which were so strange and nerve straining.

She thought of these things as Mackenzie remarked that in a few days everything would be as green as anything she could possibly imagine, and she attached to it the same value as she attached to her husband's oft-reiterated remark about India.—"You'll like it when you're out there."

How could anyone like a country where even crows strutted under trees with their mouths wide open, gasping for breath? Where there was no relief from the heat unless you sat directly under a punkah. Where cold baths were forbidden, and where the very clothes you changed into felt and smelt as though they had just come

out of an oven. Where silent, barefooted native servants seemed to be spying at every corner and door, so very quick was their reply to any call.

"Everything will be as green as anything you can possibly imagine." . . . "You'll like it when you're out there." She could hardly restrain a laugh.

"She would get used to it," Mrs. Sinclair had said, and Vivienne Garfield smiled again at the recollection. She felt these were the kind of encouraging remarks the people of the nether regions would make to a new arrival in Hell.

Vivienne, who, at sight of a blackbeetle (as she persisted in calling the homely cockroach) experienced a shiver down her back, knew it would be a long time, if ever, before she got "used to it." There were, she felt sure, scorpions and other horrid reptiles, as well as lizards and black ants, waiting somewhere in the shadows to bob up and take her unawares. . . .

"Here's Mr. Oldham coming. You'll get to know everyone in time."

Mrs. Sinclair placed a motherly hand on Vivienne's arm as she whispered the words.

"Hello, Garfield! How are you? Had a good time at Home?"

Vivienne Garfield ran her eyes over the speaker, a man of about twenty-eight years of age. Fair, with that healthy fairness which conveys the impression that its owner has stepped straight out of a bath, tall, with a well-shaped head set on a neck and shoulders which were both

powerful-looking and graceful, Oldham had the appearance of an athlete.

An immaculately white tennis shirt, unbuttoned at the collar, and well-pressed white flannel trousers gave him a *soigné*, yet somewhat *négligé*, appearance.

Mrs. Garfield's eyes took in these details at a glance. She was not quite sure whether she liked or disliked the man. She certainly did not altogether like his manner of addressing her husband. It was more indicative of an intention to annoy than a desire to accord him a welcome.

"Mrs. Garfield, let me introduce Mr. Oldham."

Vivienne held out her small, well shaped hand, which was almost lost in Oldham's. She had beautiful hands. They were the outstanding feature of an outstandingly beautiful girl—Vivienne was as yet scarce a woman.

In ordinary circumstances she might have taken his clasp for the honest grip of a friendly spirit, but, catching sight of an expression on Mrs. Sinclair's face, a suspicion crossed her mind that it was perhaps more insinuating than honest.

She noticed a supercilious curve about his mouth as he spoke, as though he were a law unto himself, a law that took little heed of conventionalities. And there was no mistaking the most striking feature of his face. The blue eyes had a peculiar, penetrating look, and for the first time in her life Vivienne felt afraid of a man.

There was something in the look he gave her

which made her apprehensive. Had anyone told her that she had lived a previous life she would have laughed the suggestion to scorn, yet on any other hypothesis it would be difficult to account for her feelings.

She was absolutely certain she had never met Oldham before, she could have sworn to that. Nevertheless, she felt she knew him intimately. Somewhere at the back of her mind was the knowledge that he had done her a great injury ages ago. She felt that he was destined to play an important part in her future and that she would again suffer at his hands.

"I say, what about Garfield for the ayah's part? Wouldn't he make a splendid ayah!"

The pause which followed Oldham's suggestion seemed to please him. Although he had not been present when Mrs. Forsythe made that untimely remark "of the country," and was unaware of the effect it had produced, he knew that he himself could not have asked a more disturbing question.

He liked making covert insinuations where Garfield was concerned, because he hated the natives with an unrelenting hate. He could see no good whatever in them. To him they were a pack of liars, always scheming to down the European. In Oldham's view a native was a man who, when hesitating between two lies, told them both.

He was sure Garfield had black blood in him. His dark skin and knowledge of the language

were unassailable proofs. And, trading on the latitude which the members of the club allowed him, and on Garfield's tolerant attitude, he lost no opportunity of baiting his victim.

Under no misapprehension, therefore, as to the meaning of the pause, he glanced in Cosgrave's direction and, giving that irrepressible youth a wink which clearly indicated that he had purposely put his foot in it and was enjoying the result, he broke the silence with another ill-advised outburst.

"Don't you think it's a splendid idea, Garfield?"

Although the actual meaning of Oldham's insinuation was lost on Vivienne, the tension told her that in some way or other her husband had been insulted, and in a state of nervous apprehension she looked at him, wondering what he would say.

Knowing her husband, as she thought she did, she expected a retort which would either silence Oldham or bring a quarrel to a head. She had seen her husband lose his temper on one occasion and the result had convinced her that he was a man who would stop at nothing when passion was aroused.

The shrug, however, which he gave instead of a reply bewildered and humiliated her. Relief, at the thought that a quarrel had been averted, was tempered by amazement. Her husband had shown a yellow streak!

Oldham, who saw the conflicting emotions

which Vivienne's tell-tale face reflected, experienced something akin to savage triumph. He, too, had a feeling that he had met her before, and he had a sense of the power he could exercise over her. Her shrinking look when they were introduced told him that.

The fact that Garfield had married a woman so obviously thoroughbred, and as fair as he was dark, outraged his feelings, and it was on this account that he determined to belittle, in front of her, the man she had married. He wanted the woman to suffer (just as every English man and woman wants every white woman to suffer who marries black blood) and he was determined that she should.

The irrepressible Cosgrave, who always acted as a foil to Oldham, played his usual rôle.

"Why d'you think it's a splendid idea, Oldham?"

"He'd make a perfect ayah. Got the face and colour and all that sort of thing, and can speak the 'bat' just like a native."

"What a brain you've got! I never thought of that."

Mrs. Sinclair, anxious to have no more untoward notes sounded, sharing the embarrassment of the company and deeply grieved at the position of the young bride, interrupted the conversation.

"We're having some amateur theatricals at the club a week tomorrow in aid of the local mission," she said, speaking in a raised voice and addressing Vivienne. "It's awfully hard up, you know, and

the South Lincs are going to stage 'If Poobah had a harem.' The idea of the play is that Japan has conquered India, and Poobah, who is a High Court Judge, thinks that the best way to learn the language is to employ a walking dictionary. He decides to marry a native woman, but, as he can't speak the language, he engages an ayah to interview candidates. Captain Power, the cantonment * Magistrate, who was to have taken the ayah's part, has been suddenly ordered to rejoin his regiment. The South Lincs are in a quandary. They're none too good at the language as they've only recently arrived, and as a good deal of the ayah's dialogue is in Hindustani, Captain Owen, who's getting up the show, has asked the club secretary to suggest someone suitable. But apparently no one is anxious to take the part "

"And the suggestion is that I should take it ? "

"Oh no, Major Garfield, I've never heard it mentioned before ! "

Then, because Mrs. Sinclair imagined he might think she shared the general opinion of Ghurumpur that he had native blood in him, and anxious to dissociate herself from that opinion, she added unconvincingly : " I don't think *you'd* be at all suitable."

"Oh, wouldn't he ! Why, you wouldn't be able to tell him from an ayah if he had a sari † on."

* Military settlement

† A length of cloth about six yards long and thirty inches wide with which the native women clothe themselves

Cosgrave, who made the remark, tried to simulate the nonchalance of Oldham as he spoke.

“Go on, Garfield, be a man! Take it on!” Oldham chuckled as he supported his friend.

Mrs. Sinclair, looking helplessly around her, said something about it not being fair in the circumstances, to ask Major Garfield and laid stress on the fact that he would have his time fully occupied with the taking over of his duties and the work of getting his bungalow ready.

Her persuasions, however, had as much effect on Oldham as water on a duck's back. He knew they were the outcome of an apprehension that if Garfield accepted the rôle, and appeared in the costume of a native woman, it would establish more firmly the belief that he had a touch of the tar brush. And, determined to give Garfield no loophole for escape, he said with just the slightest suspicion of a sneer :

“Is Garfield incapable of deciding for himself?”

Mrs. Sinclair gave a hurried glance in Garfield's direction, but there was nothing in his look to show that he was moved by the taunt. He sat there as though it did not matter to him one way or the other whether he played the part or not, and, feeling convinced that any further opposition on her part would only serve to goad Oldham, she decided to remain neutral.

She was under no misapprehension as to Garfield's character, and felt sure that if Oldham went much further he would have cause to

regret it. She waited, therefore, with apprehension for the storm to burst, convinced that Garfield's expression was only a mask for his real feelings.

The storm probably would have burst had not Vivienne intervened. The full meaning of those words, "of the country" had at last dawned on her, and, anxious to smooth things over until she could have an opportunity of ascertaining from her husband whether there was any truth in the insinuations, she decided, in order to gain time, to support the persuaders.

"Oh, you must, Hugh! I'm sure you can manage it."

"Bravo! I don't see how he can refuse after that," said Mackenzie, who hoped sincerely that Vivienne's exhortation would nip in the bud the threatening altercation.

Conscious of the sting in his wife's request, the Doctor rose. He felt that with those few words she had struck him a blow, for he sensed the impulse which prompted them.

Although well aware that retreat would create the impression that he did not care to face the music, he considered no other course was open to him. To remain would, in his present state of mind, result in an open quarrel which might conceivably lead to a scene. A scene, on his first visit to the club with his wife, and in the presence of other ladies, would be unpardonable and disastrous.

He had already made up his mind that he

would act the part of the ayah. He had acted it before in Bombay shortly after his arrival in India, and he knew it would be an easy matter for him to make himself word perfect. But until he had had an opportunity to talk the matter over with his wife it was his intention to withhold his decision.

He also felt that by leaving so precipitately and without giving Oldham an answer, the latter might be tempted to follow him into the Club house, where, Garfield felt, he could give vent to his pent up anger.

"He's off to play bridge! He's a very *successful* gambler, Mrs. Garfield," said Oldham, rising as he spoke.

Garfield, whose back was now turned to the company, smiled grimly at the remarks. He knew perfectly well the underlying suggestion. It was a grievance many had against him, that he almost invariably won at cards, and there were some who put it down to the second sight which rumour associates with black blood.

There were two persons in Ghurumpur whom Garfield disliked, if it could be said that he really disliked anybody—Oldham and Cosgrave. And because of his dislike he allowed them a latitude which otherwise he would not have done.

Well aware that they regarded him as a social inferior and that they lost no opportunity of hinting that he had a touch of the tar, it galled him that they never went beyond hints. His attitude in regard to them was that of a man

who gives his enemies enough rope with which to hang themselves, and he was hoping that on the present occasion he had given Oldham sufficient.

Suddenly the man stood in front of him. He felt the grasp of his hands on the lapels of his coat and heard him demand that he should say "Yes" or "No."

There was banter in Oldham's voice, but a banter which had the ring of provocative challenge, and for once Garfield's self discipline failed.

Looking his adversary steadfastly in the face while he made a final effort to keep his temper, he put his hands on Oldham's with the intention of freeing himself, only to find the latter's grip tightening. That tightening told him, more forcibly than words could have done, that the time had passed for temporising. It was now a case of opposing strength with strength, and the Doctor's grip tightened with a pressure that immediately made the planter wince.

To the now apprehensive Oldham, the Doctor's fingers seemed as though they were made of iron, for in spite of every effort he felt his hands being forced back with a strength that rendered his own fingers inert.

The surprising power of the man he had previously despised was such a shock to Oldham that he instantly released his grip, hoping thereby to escape further punishment, but the peace move was unsuccessful. Garfield was too inflamed with

anger to respond immediately, and the taunter found his hands forced back against his forearms. It was only by a mental effort that he restrained a cry of pain.

He bent his back and knees in an attempt to relieve the excruciating pain which shot through his stretched sinews, but no relief came. The look of the defeated swept across his face, and in that look was stamped the humiliation of a man who knew that in another second he would be on his knees begging for mercy.

The storm which was raging in Garfield's brain, and it was now a very violent and aggressive one, had not, however, robbed him of his sense of propriety. His desire to avoid a scene remained a dominating factor, and to Oldham's intense relief he was spared the outward signs of humiliation. The Doctor suddenly and unexpectedly released his hold.

"There's no need to try and bar my way, Oldham. Of course, I'll take the part if no one else will." He spoke the words in a quiet voice which in no way reflected the mental storm of a few seconds earlier, and, without waiting for any reply, passed into the Club house.

The look of defeat quickly vanished from Oldham's face. He had not uttered that cry! No one could possibly have noticed his near approach to humiliation, for Garfield had stood between him and the chabutra.

In a flash he realised that its occupants would think he had gained his own ends in his own way,

and, quite forgetting Mrs. Garfield's presence, he simulated an elation he was very far from feeling as he gave vent to the words :

“ I knew I'd make him do it. What an ayah he'll make ! I'll bet his grandmother was one if his mother wasn't ! ”

CHAPTER III

HAD Vivienne Garfield's upbringing been other than it was she might have left the club in a very subdued state of mind. The strangeness of her surroundings, the unfamiliar mode of living, the obnoxious sights which had obtruded themselves on her vision ever since her arrival in India, were in themselves nerve-straining enough to depress the mind of any ordinary woman. But on the top of all this to have had to face a situation which led her to believe that her husband was unpopular, and to see the man she admired, the man she thought was a tower of hidden strength, take insults lying down, was calculated to reduce an even stronger-minded woman than she was to tears.

Vivienne was, however, a modern product, and perhaps her outlook on life was ultra-modern.

She could cry on occasion as bitterly as any woman, and on occasion could feel sorry for herself, but these occasions were few and far between. Generally she preferred to kick against the pricks and say "damn!" under her breath when things went awry.

• This was her mood as she seated herself beside her husband in the tonga and watched, with a scowl on her face, the lights of the club recede into the distance.

She was more annoyed with everybody in general, and her husband in particular, than sorry for herself. The strain of the last few days was beginning to tell. The nerve-racking conversation on the chabutra, and the shock of her husband's humiliating behaviour had brought on a splitting headache. And though she knew that she was in no mood to talk rationally, or with restraint, and ought to leave the questions which she wished to ask her husband until a more fitting occasion, she was not prepared to postpone them.

To have done so would have needed self-discipline, and Vivienne Garfield had never exercised self-discipline in her life !

Brought up by parents who trusted to the honour of her immature mind to guide her footsteps, the rod, in the form of any disciplinary corrective, had been spared, and the child spoilt. She had been reasoned with when she should have been reprimanded, argued with when she should have been punished. In consequence she had lived a free and untrammelled life.

As a result of that freedom she had developed a precocity which was not surprising and had accumulated knowledge far in advance of her years.

At sixteen she looked on boys of her own age

as mere children and sought the company of youths some ten years older. Long before she was out of her teens she smoked when and where she liked, visited night clubs with her men friends, and had, on the quiet, been to several clubs of dubious reputation.

At twenty the conversation of these youths palled, and though her parents were astonished at her lack of interest in youths of marriageable age and her preference for the company of men so many years her senior, they considered it to be the natural result of a high intellect properly trained, and that it hall-marked their discernment in bringing her up as they had done.

Before her marriage she had seen more of life than her parents ; had experienced every thrill a maiden can. She was more blasé at twenty-one than the ordinary person is at two score years and ten.

It was the greater experience of these older men which constituted the attraction, and because there is no such power as the power of the tongue she had fallen an easy prey to Hugh Garfield.

The very antithesis of herself, she was forced to admire his self discipline, his, to her, unfathomable knowledge of the world, for Hugh Garfield had been a great traveller.

At one time or another he had visited every important country in Europe. He had spent his first furlough travelling round the world, and because he was a keen observer and a fluent linguist he had seen more than the ordinary traveller sees.

Possessing a particularly retentive memory, the gift of describing what he had seen and capable of conjuring the atmosphere in which he had seen it, he had charmed her mind and stimulated her imagination.

In consequence she came to visualize the world through his spectacles. She felt that in other lands and amid other scenes there were new thrills to be experienced, and though accustomed to be wooed she turned wooer and virtually ran after Hugh Garfield.

Unaccustomed to the admiration of a pretty woman, and attributing to Vivienne virtues she did not possess, Garfield fell an easy victim and the end was a foregone conclusion.

Vivienne, because she had youth and beauty on her side, felt she had the world at her feet. And because she did not realise that beauty is transient, or that her precocious conversation, which was not altogether out of keeping with her vivacious behaviour, would cease to attract in the setting which advancing years would bring, she thought that the world would always be at her feet. But the experience on the chabutra now shook her confidence. There was no world to conquer in Ghurumpur, and the thought robbed life of its savour.

The India, as he had portrayed it to her, did not exist ! Had he deceived her in other things also ? Was there some truth in the aspersion that he was " of the country " ?

These thoughts smouldered in her angered

mind as she sat beside him, racking her brain for the best way to vent her spleen on the man who had placed her in such uncongenial surroundings.

Garfield was not in any way cognizant of the trend of her thoughts. He had no premonition of a coming storm. He felt, if anything, he had a grievance against her for giving him that sting on the chabutra, but he had already decided to make no reference to it. He made allowances for what must have been to her a strange experience, and was on the point of asking her what she thought of the people with whom she had come in contact, when he noticed that she was rubbing first one foot and then the other against her ankles.

All thought of what had transpired on the chabutra was instantly dismissed from his mind and, slipping his hand into hers, he said com-miseratingly: "What is it, Vi? Have the mosquitoes been biting you? You must put your feet in hot water as soon as you get in and I'll rub them with something."

"I'd rather scratch the skin off my feet than put them in hot water again, thank you," she said heatedly.

The words took Garfield by surprise. He was at a loss to account for her petulant outburst. He did not realise it was the outcome of a belief that her bodily ailments were of more concern to him than the mental torture he must know she had been through. And, manlike, he promptly proceeded to put his foot further into it.

"Vi, don't talk like that, dear. I can see you've been bitten to death by the way you're rubbing and if you don't give your feet a thorough soaking you'll go on scratching them all night, and that'll only make them worse. I should have thought of the mosquitoes. To-morrow I'll give you some oil of verbena to rub on your stockings; that'll keep them off."

"Then you've let me be bitten to death when you could have stopped it?"

"Well, Vi dear, I didn't think about it. You know, one forgets the trials of a newcomer."

"Hang it all, Hugh, a man is supposed to look after his wife! It's all because you made me go to the club when I didn't want to, and you hardly gave me time to dress!"

"I thought the sooner you got it over the better, Vi."

That gave her an opening :—"You knew there was something to get over then?"

"What are you driving at? My dear girl, I don't think I quite understand you."

"No, of course not! Or you pretend you don't! Do you think I don't know now what Mrs. Forsythe meant when she said you were 'of the country'? Do you think I don't know what that cad, Mr. Oldham, was driving at? . . . Get it over, indeed! I should think there is something to get over! . . . But I never thought you had a yellow streak . . . taking insults lying down!"

"Vi, what d'you mean?"

"You know well enough what I mean! If I'd been a man I'd have thrashed that cad in front of everyone until he couldn't move, and you sat there as though he were patting your back. If he'd said my grandmother or mother was an ayah I'd have boxed his ears, although I am a woman!"

"He didn't say anything of the kind. I was waiting for him to say something like that, but I'm not going to deal with veiled hints. It's not . . ."

"But I heard him! And you knew what he was driving at, didn't you?"

"Yes, but——"

"But you preferred to be bullied by him! If he had said half as much to me I wouldn't have agreed to play the ayah's part."

"Oh but, my dear, you tried to persuade me! And I wasn't bullied into it. I wanted to draw Oldham on to give me an opportunity to tell him what I thought of his behaviour. That's why I left, I thought he would follow me and I'd have it out with him in the club house."

"And instead of following you he barred your way and made you give in."

"He didn't, Vi." Hugh was beginning to speak wearily. "He barred my way, yes, and caught me by the coat, but I don't think he'll do it again."

Vivienne felt her husband had now dropped to zero in her estimation. What had he done to prevent Mr. Oldham from doing it again?

Nothing ! He was only fencing for time to ferret out some plausible excuse for his behaviour, and with that thought she lost control of herself and said cuttingly : " Was your grandmother or mother an ayah ? "

" Vivienne ! "

" I'm just asking you a simple question ! . . . Was she or was she not ? "

" I'm not going to answer if you speak like that, Vi. I've told you I'm half Spanish, isn't that enough ? "

" No ! "

" Poor little Vi ! You're not yourself tonight. "

The tonga came to a halt under the thatched porch of the Sinclairs' bungalow. The words : " Poor little Vi ! You're not yourself tonight, " were the last straw. It seemed to her that, in his eyes, she had ceased to be a woman, that he regarded her as a child ; a child who could be hoodwinked, and her resentment rose to the point of exasperation.

Ever since she had arrived in India he had treated her more and more like a child, and she was getting ' fed up ' with such treatment. She wondered why she had met none of his relations. She felt convinced that this Spanish blood of his was a myth. People didn't make covert hints about being " of the country " for nothing. All his talk about India had been a mass of deception, she felt sure of that now. If he could deceive her in one thing he could deceive her in another. What did he mean by saying,—" I thought it

better for you to get it over" ? There *could* be only one meaning to it.

She stepped down from the tonga and fled up the verandah steps ; and then as though she had not suffered enough she heard him speaking again, speaking as one would to a peevish, overwrought child.

" If I were you, Vi, I'd go to bed. I'll ask Mrs. Sinclair to send in your dinner."

She turned and faced him with fury in her eyes. " Go to bed, Hugh ? I'm *damned* if I will."

CHAPTER IV

"MRS. GARFIELD, I'm going round to see a guard's wife; would you like to come? She's just had a baby and I want to take her some ice, and a little jelly my cook's made."

Vivienne accepted the invitation with alacrity. Her husband was at Gahar, visiting a dispensary some thirty-five miles away. He had left hurriedly the day before in response to an urgent telegram, and was not expected back until lunch time; consequently she found time hanging heavily on her hands.

Ever since that night on the chabutra when Oldham had forced her husband to give a promise to play the ayah's part, she and Hugh had never quite made up the disagreement which followed.

Like every woman she admired courage, and she had seen no courage when he had forced Oldham on that memorable occasion. Anger was there, she had seen an expression of it momentarily in his eyes, and that made his conduct, from her point of view, all the more humiliating. He had not, as she thought, the pluck to give

even anger rein but, on the contrary, had stifled it and spoken calmly, even politely.

As the days passed her opinion of her husband underwent a slight change. Once or twice it had been on the tip of her tongue to re-open the question of his parentage, but somehow she could not bring herself to do it. She felt that, if she did so, she would hear the truth, and in her calmer moods she did not want the truth; she was afraid of it.

Luckily, no more untoward scenes had occurred at the club. The senior officials appeared to treat her husband with respect, and on many occasions deferred to his opinion. This deference convinced her that he was not so unpopular as she had at first supposed, and in consequence she felt it was mostly her fault that any misunderstanding had arisen, and her husband's constant solicitude for her welfare, made her regret her ill-timed, angry outburst.

Her enforced idleness added to the uneasiness of her mind. They had been a whole week with the Sinclairs, and she was longing to get into a bungalow of her own, where she would have household duties to occupy her time.

Mrs. Sinclair's invitation came at a very opportune moment. A drive in the tonga, even through pouring rain, would break the monotony of a particularly idle morning; it would also relieve her thoughts.

She was getting "used to things" gradually if slowly, but the more she thought of her husband's

behaviour, and she was always thinking of it, the more she thought of her broken romance. For, though she would not admit it to herself, Hugh Garfield had in reality ceased to be a hero in her eyes.

It would make no difference to her love, she argued, as she pushed the long hatpins through her topee.*

From habit she stood before the glass, re-arranging her hair, though well aware that no amount of re-arranging could obliterate the hideousness of the topee.

Every woman in the Station wore one or other of the three or four available standard shapes. There was no variety worth talking about, and one shape was just as hideous as another.

The rain dripped from the eaves of the thatched bungalow with monotonous regularity. The sound of the drips had a depressing effect, and Vivienne reflected on the hopelessness of her position as a bride in a strange land. An ironical smile pursed her lips. A bride? Yes, of course she was a bride, but what a snare and delusion marriage was! She could hardly conceive that her reflection in the glass, under the hard, unrelenting lines of the topee, was the reflection of one who had, only a short time ago, been the much sought after Vivienne Temple.

How homesick she was! She felt as though she had lost not only an ideal but her beauty as well. She *had* been pretty, she knew it, perhaps

more than pretty, and, though everybody in the Station knew that a more beautiful woman had never set foot in Ghurumpur, Vivienne felt she had lost everything.

“Are you ready?”

Of course she was ready! She had only been passing the time with idle thoughts in front of the mirror and, hastily snatching up a pair of chamois leather gloves from the dressing table, she passed out of her room, and was soon seated beside Mrs. Sinclair in the back seat of the tonga, jogging towards the railway settlement.

Yes, she was getting used to things. The tonga with its pair of bullocks, jingling bells and centre pole, produced no sense of novelty. The clucking noise which the tonga wallah * made with his mouth as he twisted the tails of the bullocks into loops and pushed them outward from the tonga to accelerate their pace, and the jog which accompanied the manœuvre, she accepted with indifference. Even the use of the short bamboo goad, with its iron spike at the end, with which the tonga wallah on occasion mercilessly prodded the animals, produced no feeling of revulsion.

She sat chatting to Mrs. Sinclair, taking no notice of her surroundings, the while the placid, docile-looking bullocks jogged along the red mud-covered roads through the avenues of tamarind trees which sheltered them.

Presently the railway settlement loomed in sight. The driver produced a more than usually

Literally - tonga man, i.e., the driver

loud clucking noise from his throat. The nearside bullock was pushed outward with a strong forearm drive ; a well-directed jab from the spiked goad stimulated its movements, and the tonga, turning right-handed through an open gateway, proceeded at a leisurely pace along the main road of the railway settlement.

The fencing on each side of the road was broken at regular intervals by gateways which gave access to innumerable bungalows set back about fifty yards from the roadway. The similarity of the bungalows was apparent. They were obviously built to the same plan ; and each was placed at equal distances from its neighbours.

The fenced in compounds in which each bungalow was centrally placed were about half an acre in size, and all bore evidence of some attempt at gardening. Mostly, however, they reflected bygone energies. Very few of them showed signs of up-to-date care.

"The third bungalow on the left." Mrs. Sinclair gave the order in Hindustani, and Vivienne was not prepared for the turn.

Consequently, when a few seconds later the right arm of the tonga wallah shot out and the spiked goad found its mark on a particularly sore place of the offside bullock's hide, she was jerked sideways and her topee came in contact with the iron framework of the tonga hood.

She gave a little laugh, as people often do when they are taken unawares, then, before she could steady herself, the bullocks, realising that they

had come to their journey's end, broke into a sharp trot and nearly jerked her out of the tonga.

A moment later, in response to some mutterings of the tonga wallah, they broke from a trot to a walk and halted in front of the steps which led to the verandah of the bungalow.

In a loud voice the tonga wallah gave vent to his usual manner of announcing the arrival of the wife of the chief magistrate of the district.

"Is anyone there? The burra * memsahib is here!"

A door chick, with its horizontal stripes of green painted bamboo, the thickness of reeds, separated by knotted cords and lined with navy blue semi-transparent muslin, was drawn aside, and a little girl some three or four years old and as fair as a lily peeped out and shouted: "Ma! The burra memsahib has come!"

A slatternly-looking ayah, fat and dishevelled, appeared and, making certain that it was the chief magistrate's wife, salaamed profusely. Then raising the loose end of her sari which had dropped over her shoulders, she covered her dirty, greasy-looking head, and she held a whispered conversation with someone in the room. Presently a voice from the interior invited them to enter. The slatternly ayah, beaming all over her oily face, pulled the chick outwards and Mrs. Sinclair and her companion passed through.

As Vivienne came near the smirking ayah, an over-powering odour of cocoanut oil filled her

* "Burra," literally big, better translated by the word "boss"

nostrils; the woman's dirty sari, tucked so tightly round her waist that the bronze-coloured flesh fell in folds over it, sent something like a shudder through her as she went into the darkened room.

In spite of the fact that the sky was overcast with heavy low-drifting clouds, making the atmosphere outside dull and grey, the contrast in light was so great that, for a minute or two, Mrs. Garfield was unable to take in her surroundings. The bamboo chicks, with their dark blue linings, which covered the doorways and the solitary window, allowed so little light to pass, that Vivienne could only see the outlines of the bed, the doorway opening on to the back verandah shrouded with its chick, and another open doorway on the left, without a chick, leading to an adjoining bathroom.

But what she was most conscious of was the unpleasant and overpowering odour of the place. The heat and a stale, foetid smell had a nauseating effect.

"I think you should have a little more air in this room," said Mrs. Sinclair, advancing, with the obvious intention of raising it, towards the chick in the doorway which led to the back verandah.

"Oh, please don't, Mrs. Sinclair." The voice came from the bed, and Vivienne's eyes, now somewhat accustomed to the gloom, took in the pale and wan face of a woman lying on a double bed. Gradually, as her eyes became more accus-

tomed to the shrouded light, they took in further details. The low framework of the bed and its rough-hewn stout wooden legs became visible. Vivienne also noticed the absence of a mattress of any kind. Its place was taken by stout belting, a little narrower than the girth of a saddle and somewhat resembling saddle girths in texture. The cross strips were woven alternately under and over those which went from the head to the foot of the bed. The dark brown camel blankets, much narrower in width than the bed itself, exposed the woven belting for a few inches along each side, and its colour rivetted her attention. Here and there the webbing showed splashes of white, but on the whole it was so soiled that it differed little in colour from the dirty woodwork of the bed, which latter toned in with the long, unwashed floor of dark glazed stable tiles.

"How are you feeling, Mrs. Bell?" said Mrs. Sinclair, who, ignoring the sick woman's protest, had contrived to roll up and fasten the chick, thus flooding the room with light. "You know you must have fresh air, both for your own sake and the baby's. I've brought you a little jelly and some ice."

The unkempt condition of the room which was now apparent gave Vivienne another shock. The turquoise-blue distempered walls were splashed with water-marks and dirt for a foot or two above the floor. Several grimy towels, hanging over a string stretched diagonally from

two nails across the corner of the room, caught her eye. And the lumps of plaster which had dropped out with the hammering in of the nails, were still on the floor. In another corner, full of muddy-coloured clothes, was a dilapidated teakwood and cane soiled-linen basket without a cover. The one solitary teakwood chair was lumbered with a guard's cast-off uniform which had obviously lain there since the night before, and a few baby garments thrown carelessly on the top of it.

"Winifred, will you tell ayah to bring in two chairs, there's a dear."

A child's voice on the verandah repeated the order in Hindustani and a moment later the chick was drawn aside by Winifred while the ayah, holding one chair in front of her and dragging another behind, waddled through. Placing one at each side of the bed, she salaamed again and invited the ladies to be seated.

Mrs. Sinclair contented herself with nodding her thanks but, as the ayah held the chair invitingly, Mrs. Bell said: "Won't you sit down, Mrs. Sinclair? I don't know the other lady's name."

"Mrs. Garfield—but we can't stay, thanks; we've only just come to see how you are. It's nearly time for tiffin and we must be going back."

"Oh, the doctor's wife! I'm very pleased to meet you. The doctor's a great friend of ours."

"Is he?" said Mrs. Garfield blankly. She was utterly at a loss to find a more suitable reply.

"Oh yes, he understands us, you see. We more or less look on him as one of the family. He makes himself so much at home when he comes."

"How's the baby?" hurriedly interjected Mrs. Sinclair, anxious to turn the conversation. "What name are you going to give him?"

"We're going to call him Hugh after the doctor." And Mrs. Bell turned down the dark brown camel blankets as she spoke and showed the child at her breast.

Vivienne could hardly believe her eyes. Mrs. Bell was almost as fair as an Englishwoman. Her child, Winifred, was even more fair, but the baby at her breast was black, and to Vivienne's unaccustomed eyes the contrast was revolting.

The baby was going to be called Hugh after her husband! The idea, for very concrete reasons, sickened her. The squalor and the lackadaisical household had eaten into her vitals. The baby, a *black* baby, which lived in that atmosphere was going to be called Hugh after the doctor! After *her* husband! The thought was so nauseating that Vivienne was not cognisant of the passing of time, and the conversation between Mrs. Sinclair and Mrs. Bell became nothing but unintelligible murmurs to her.

Not until she was seated in the tonga on the return journey was she able to think clearly.

And this was India ! The India which her husband had told her she would come to like, with a liking which would unsettle her for any other part of the world.

"She's very ill, isn't she ?"

"Yes," was Vivienne's monosyllable reply.

"I'm afraid it's upset you ? I shouldn't have taken you with me so soon. The squalor's apt to upset a newcomer. I should have thought of that."

"Well, it was rather a shock."

"But you'll get used to them in time. Eurasians are like that. My husband says they've all the vices of the English and the natives and none of their virtues."

"Well, they evidently don't like fresh air."

"I know. Did you hear Mrs. Bell telling the ayah to lower the chick as we left ? Oh, of course you didn't. I forgot you don't understand Hindustani."

"I can't understand a woman like that having such a black baby. I suppose her husband's a native ?"

"No, he's not, he's as English as we are. He was a sergeant in the Dorsetshire regiment before he was a guard on the railway ; they were married about five years ago."

"Five years ago ?" The words suggested something incredible. Could it be possible that Winifred was their child ?

"You see, that's the worst of marrying a Eurasian. You never know what the offspring

will be like. My husband says there's always a throwback sooner or later. Mrs. Bell's a Eurasian, you see."

"A throwback! What's a throwback?"

"Well, that baby's a throwback."

"I don't understand," said Vivienne falteringly.

"Well, you see, if an Englishman marries a woman 'of the country' the children are often as fair as Europeans, but sooner or later there comes a black child, and Hugh is a typical throwback."

It was well for Hugh Garfield's wife that at that moment the tonga drew up under the porch of the Sinclair's bungalow. The words "of the country" re-fired themselves on her brain. She had not forgotten Oldham's remark:—"His grandmother was an ayah if his mother wasn't!" Like a stunned woman she stepped out of the tonga and sought her room.

Was her husband a Eurasian? And was there the possibility of her having a black baby? She felt like swooning at the thought, and sat on the side of her bed in a listless attitude. Hugh would be returning soon! How could she face him with such horrible thoughts in her mind? His return to which she had been looking forward gave her no feeling of pleasure now. "Of the country!" Why hadn't he told her?

And then like one drowning and clutching at a straw she seized on Mrs. Sinclair's exact words. 'If an Englishman marries a woman of the country the children are often as fair as Euro-

peans, but sooner or later there comes a black child.'

Perhaps it wasn't the same if a man "of the country" married an Englishwoman? Oh, perhaps it wasn't the same, it couldn't be! How could she have a black baby at her breast?

There was the sound of horses' hoofs on the drive. They drew nearer and stopped under the porch.

"Syce!" It was her husband's voice. But instead of rushing out to meet him she retired into the bathroom and shut the door. The conclusion of Mrs. Sinclair's sentence was hammering in her brain. . . "Hugh is a typical throwback!" And Hugh was to be the name of their child if he were a son.

"Oh God, can these things be?"

CHAPTER V

VIVIENNE however was mistaken. It was not her husband's voice she had heard, but that of Captain Forsythe who had come to return a book Mrs. Sinclair had loaned to him.

Major Garfield at the moment was deep in conversation with the Rajah of Kohajulia, whose servant had waylaid him on his return journey from Gahar.

Hot and tired after a long journey, he felt annoyed at the delay. Had he thought the Rajah's request to visit the Palace implied a professional call he would have stifled his resentment, but he had little reason to think the Rajah was in need of his services. The latter's antipathy to allopathic medicine was well known.

The Rajah made no secret of his belief that English drugs, in many cases, did more harm than good. He believed that all disease was the result of the evil eye. . . . "Break the spell and you cure the patient," was an axiom as far as he was concerned.

•But Garfield felt he could not ignore the Rajah's request, for though not a ruling Prince in name, he was *de facto*, ruling as his forefathers had ruled before him.

Few of his raiyots* sought the aid of the British Courts, and the few that did never ceased to regret it.

Their houses had a mysterious way of catching fire; and when they required wood from the jungle to rebuild they found they had to pay an exorbitant price to obtain it. Then, from one cause to another they found so much difficulty in removing it, owing to quarrels with the Rajah's forest guards, that the rains were upon them before they had rebuilt their homes.

Their cattle developed an unfortunate habit of straying into other raiyots' fields, and were in consequence continually being impounded in the local pound. Not only did the fees to release them mount up but the damage, which their neighbours alleged they had sustained, was appalling.

They found the litigation they had initiated was interminable. Time after time the case was postponed on some pretext or another, and, if they won, they were dragged from court to court on appeal, until, hopelessly in debt, they were sold up lock, stock and barrel.

If they lost, as more generally happened, financial disaster overtook them more speedily.

“How could anyone have respect for the

Tenants.

English Courts ? ” the Rajah had once asked the Major.

Garfield was staggered by the question. . . .

“ How can anyone have respect for the English Courts, Rajah ? ” The irony in Garfield’s voice as he repeated the sentence was unmistakeable. “ Why, if there’s one thing for which the British Raj * is more deserving of praise than another, it is for the justice which our courts administer.”

He felt he could safely make this stand for British justice. It was Britain’s proudest boast, one which was incontrovertible.

“ Yes, Major, I have good cause to ask that question. The law against perjury is dead in this land. You know it, and I know it. Ask any magistrate, ask any judge, and he will tell you it is so. If you ask them why, they will tell you that if everyone who committed perjury was prosecuted there would not be enough gaols in the land to hold them.”

“ That’s not the fault of the British Raj ! ” Garfield replied with a chuckle. “ If the people of this country have so little regard for the truth, it’s their fault, isn’t it ? ”

“ I am not so sure about that, Major. You see, it was the British Raj which waived the necessity for an oath. In the old days our people swore with their hands on a sacred bull, or on the head of one of their sons, and then they understood the necessity for telling the truth. Now,” the Rajah shrugged his shoulders, “ they simply

Rule.

affirm, and with the uneducated masses an affirmation means no more than 'Yes, we have no bananas,' as your saying goes, if as much."

Garfield was almost doubled up with laughter.

"You may laugh, Major, but it is very serious. When there is land to grab, or land to defend, do you wonder that people lie in their own interests?"

"It's a deplorable thing," said Garfield with mock gravity.

"Ah, Major, yes, yes! But you have forgotten one of your sayings. . . . 'Our tongues are given us to hide our thoughts.' If you separate justice from religious beliefs, what is the penalty of a lie? Earthly punishment, huh? And when there is no earthly punishment there is no penalty. You may be very proud of your British courts. I cannot say that I am proud of them, but I am very pleased. They suit the longest purse."

"Well, according to your ideas, it's a damn rotten mess up! I'm afraid you're prejudiced, Rajah."

"Oh, no, not prejudiced, Major—astonished! I have myself heard your District Judge say in court that so much false evidence has been given on both sides that it was difficult to separate the wheats from the chaffs, and I have known cases where your learned Judge has accepted evidence which I knew was false, and disbelieved evidence which I knew was true, and in giving his judgment has laid stress on the demeanour of the witnesses."

"What else could he do in such circumstances?"

"Oh, he is a very wise and learned Judge, Major, because in case of an appeal he is not likely to be upset! You cannot import the demeanour of a witness into the Appellate Court. But I often wonder why, Major, your language is so rich in sayings which you take no heed of. It is a saying of yours, I believe, that one should not judge by appearances. The professional witness, at the beck and call of everyone who can afford him, has always a splendid demeanour. Can you wonder that there is so often a miscarriage of justice?"

"I think, Rajah, you're only seeing things from one viewpoint. 'One swallow doesn't make a summer.' Perhaps you know that saying?" Garfield added, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Oh, yes, I know all your sayings. But if you will excuse me, I think your saying is, 'One sparrow does not make a summer,' You see, the swallow is not indigenous to your country."

Garfield smiled, but made no effort to contradict the Rajah. He made allowances for the habit of educated Indians to misquote or misapply English sayings in the exuberance of their well-known versatility.

"But let me assure you that these cases are more the rule than the exception," the Rajah continued. "In your ideas, the law is a game, and you play it according to rule. Mark my words, Major, every time there is a miscarriage

of justice the Pleaders * know it, but it is part of the game to keep up the farce. It is not to their interests to belittle a practice which brings them so much filthy lucre. I think it was a celebrated lawyer who invented that term ! But is it any wonder that at heart they have contempt for a judicial system which permits this perjury, and that the contempt is spreading to an ever-widening circle ? ”

“ Yes, Rajah, but with the spread of education all this will disappear in time.”

“ I see no evidence of it, Major. The pearl cannot protect the oyster—that is one of our sayings. In my opinion your educational system is all wrong. Education should follow development, but in this country development has followed education, and lags so far behind that the openings for the educated are, as your saying goes, few and far between. You see, I have studied these things. It is what I went to England for.”

“ It appears to me you’ve nothing but condemnation for our rule ? ”

“ Oh no ! At the beginning I think your rule, in many ways, was perfectly right. You deposed many ruling Princes on account of their despotism, but you made the mistake of substituting a British Administration. Had you selected an enlightened member of the ruling House to occupy the gudda,† and exercised the same supervision as you exercise in the case of the few

existing ruling Princes, there would be no sedition to-day."

Garfield moved impatiently.

"But I must not run down everything, Major. As far as your profession is concerned I have some respect for it. We all admire the devotion of your doctors to the cause of humanity, their unselfishness and, if my people tell me rightly, their unfailing courtesy and sympathy. The only thing I do not agree with is your system of medicine. You see, the teaching of our women-folk is against it, and we are all children of our mothers and are brought up in their beliefs. And, Major, I certainly disapprove of inoculation and the injection of cultures. My High Priest tells me that it is an infraction of our religious beliefs, and though the patients sometimes recover sometimes they die, and, as my High Priest says, how can you tell that the injection cured them? No, Major, it is not your medicines I admire, it is your devotion."

"But, Rajah, we find our work increasing. We attend more and more of your people every day. Surely you must see that we can't progress like this unless we're working on the right lines?"

"I admit that, Major. But you will probably find that in the majority of cases they have tried our own medicine people first, and when they have failed to cast out the evil eye and the patient gets worse instead of better, it is only then they seek your aid. I suppose there are some evil spirits which you Europeans bring over with you

to this country, and such evil spirits are probably best cast out by Europeans. In any case, Major, there is no telling what people will do as a last resource. Perhaps if I could not be cured by my State Physician, in a last extremity I might supplicate your aid."

CHAPTER VI

It was the recollection of the Rajah's remark : " Perhaps if I could not be cured by my State Physician, in a last extremity I might supplicate your aid " which decided Garfield to break his journey.

He had promised his wife to return in time for tiffin, and although he had stayed up all night with a low caste pauper suffering from cholera, injecting salt water into his veins, he was making every effort to adhere to his programme.

Tired and weary after his journey of the day before, his arduous duties throughout the night, and almost spent with his morning's ride, undertaken in a drizzling rain, he had little to comfort him except the knowledge that his patient would recover. And so his inclination was to ride on and tell the Rajah's messenger that he would return at the first opportunity.

This inclination was all the more firmly implanted because he felt that Vivienne was beginning to lean a little more on him. He understood her feeling of homesickness and he felt it

his duty to give her all the sympathy and encouragement he could, until, with the passing of time and the wearing away of innovations, she could take a more normal view of things.

On his lonely journey he had been soliloquising. . . . Fate had been unkind to him. He was to have been married in July and return to India in November when the weather would have been cooler, and Vivienne's trials nothing like so great. Then, just when all arrangements had been made, her mother had been taken seriously ill and the wedding was put off till after her death.

He extended his leave, taking all that was due to him, expecting that they would arrive in India after the rains had broken, but the rains had been delayed, and the heat of the railway journey had almost prostrated his wife.

For a time she lost her appetite because she could not overcome her aversion to the coffee coloured hands which waited at the table. Then Mrs. Sinclair, no doubt with the very best intentions of educating her for her household duties, had taken her into the bawachi-kana * to show her how the cooking was done, and the fat, perspiring Mug cook, † with nothing but a loin cloth round his waist, was detected in the act of wiping a soufflé dish with the hem of his loin cloth.

Garfield, as he reined in his horse at the summons of the Rajah's servant, had an apprehensive feeling that on his return he would find

she had seen or heard something to make her more homesick.

It was therefore with little grace that he asked the question :

“What does the Rajah want ? ”

“I do not know, Sahib, but he knew you had gone to Gahar and sent his motor-car to fetch you. He stationed me here in case you came on horseback by this road.”

Hugh thought for a moment, drew out his watch and looked at the time. . . . Ten minutes to twelve ! And another ten miles to go, but he had a change of horses another two miles on, and if the Rajah did not keep him more than a few minutes he could get to Ghurumpur by one ; just giving him time for a bath and change before tiffin.

Of course, it would mean pushing his horses along, and he did not like pushing horses at that season of the year. However, he had not spared himself, and the horses could now stand it better than he could. It might be a case of serious illness after all.

So, throwing the reins to the messenger, he slipped from the saddle and, passing through the gate of the Palace, found himself in the marble-tiled entrance hall.

“Will you tell the Rajah Sahib I am here ! ”

A handsome-looking, stalwart peon,* dressed in spotlessly white tunic and trousers with a brilliant crimson sash round his waist, raised his hand to his head as he bowed and answered :

Orderly.

"Yes, Sahib!"

"Quick! I have not much time to waste."

"Protector of the Poor, I will inform the Maharajah Bahadur immediately. Will you condescend to wait here."

With the noiseless tread of bare feet the peon, Mahabir, crossed the hall and, pulling aside a dark-blue and gold woven purdah,* admitted the Doctor to a reception room.

"Pray be seated, your Honour."

"Yes, but be quick! I must be back at Ghurumpur by one o'clock."

The heavy purdah fell back as the peon released it, and Garfield, finding himself alone, paced impatiently up and down the room for what seemed an interminable time, but was in fact a little less than ten minutes.

Then he heard the sound of sandalled feet descending the central marble staircase which led from the private apartments to the hall, and a few seconds later the purdah was again drawn aside and the Rajah entered.

"It is very good of you, Major, to stop on your journey like this. Let me assure you that nothing but the most urgent reasons compelled me to solicit your aid. Pray be seated."

"I'm in an awful hurry, Rajah. You see, my wife's feeling the heat and I promised I'd return by lunch time. She's not quite used to the country yet, you know."

The Rajah's eyes fastened on the drawn, tired face of his visitor.

"I am afraid, Major, you are very tired, huh ?"

"Oh, just so-so ! I had a very uncomfortable ride of thirty-five miles to Gahar yesterday in response to an urgent wire. Case of cholera, and I was up all night."

"A good fee, I suppose, Major !"

There was something in the expression on Garfield's face which made the Rajah realise the remark was an unfortunate one.

"No, my patient was a Chumar,* and a very poor one, but I think I've pulled him round. I'd be awfully glad of a drink if it wouldn't take long ; I've had a beastly journey this morning, the rivers I had to cross are in flood after last night's rain, and the horse I was riding got into a quicksand. Had to leave it behind and walk four miles before I reached the changing place. It was a borrowed horse unfortunately. If it had been one of my own it wouldn't have mattered so much, I could have waited before replacing it, but Captain Forsythe can't afford to lose a horse or wait either."

"Oh, I cannot allow you——" The Rajah did not finish the sentence. "Forgive me, Major, I had forgotten you were thirsty," and, turning to an attendant, he gave an order in a language Garfield did not understand and relapsed into silence.

The attendant disappeared and a moment

Leather-worker.

later, with a suddenness somewhat unusual in a Rajah's Palace, a servant entered with a bottle of whisky and an iced soda.

Garfield, urged by his thirst, advanced eagerly to help himself, but the Rajah forestalled him.

"Say when, Major!"

The next instant the servant was astonished to see the Rajah emptying the soda, with his own hands, into the tumbler and offering Garfield his peg.

"And this Chumar, Major, was he one of my people?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid he's fallen on evil days."

"And you stayed up all night with a low caste Chumar?"

"Yes."

"And you have ridden like this because you promised your wife you would be back for lunch?"

Garfield nodded; he was too busy drinking to speak.

"Then my business will keep, Major, and as I have delayed you I have already arranged to send you on in my car. If you will return when it is convenient I shall be deeply in your debt. May I escort you?" and, waving the servant aside, the Rajah lifted up the purdah and signalled Garfield to pass.

"After you, Major."

"No, Rajah," said Garfield, somewhat overwhelmed at the attention shown him.

"Well, Major, if you will excuse me and allow

me to change my mind I will remain here a little while."

Garfield passed into the hall and was ushered by Mahabir through the entrance door of the Palace.

The car was just about to start when he remembered that he had left his whip behind and, hastily telling the native driver to "wait a minute," he jumped out of the car, passed through the hall and, lifting the purdah, saw the Rajah pacing up and down the room.

"I've forgotten my whip."

The Rajah, whose back was turned towards him, glanced at the inlaid marble table and, picking up the whip, handed it to the Major, but in spite of the bow which accompanied the action he momentarily exposed his care-stamped face. The doctor had a strong suspicion that the eyes which looked into his were misty, and it was not the whip he grasped but the Rajah's hand.

"What's the matter?"

As Garfield asked the question he thought he had been mistaken. The Rajah's eyes were as clear as his own, the lines round his mouth more firm than ever.

"Nothing, Major. Why do you ask?"

Something in his grip belied the Rajah's words.

"What is it, Rajah?"

The commanding ring of the ruling race was in Garfield's voice as he spoke. And as though he were uttering words against his will, the Rajah spoke his message.

“The Rani—she is very ill.”

“Then why on earth didn’t you tell me ?”

“Well, Major, I could not very well. You see, I . . . knew what you had been through, and I saw your anxiety on your wife’s account. And I saw an Englishman staying up all night with an outcast in order to save his life. So because an Englishman can do this I put aside my private affairs because—because, Major, you have taught me something.”

“Rajah! You have taught me something, also, you have told me in those few words something of the nobility of mind which goes with your high estate. You’ve taught me that a wife must make sacrifices as we all must at some time or another. . . . I am at your service.”

CHAPTER VII

“MAJOR, you are too kind, and as the Rani is very seriously ill I am tempted to accept your offer. My State Physician has done all he can and I am . . . apprehensive that I shall . . . lose her. She has had very high fever for over a week; at times she talks all sorts of nonsense, and this morning during a lucid interval she complained that her throat was so painful that she could not swallow. You are proably well aware that I have two other wives, but as they bore me no children I yielded to the entreaties of my Diwan * and was married a third time about a year ago.”

Garfield nodded, and the Rajah continued :

“Though my instincts are not polygamous, Major, I felt it a duty that I owed to my House. You see, I am the last of my line, and we people think that to die childless is an unpardonable sin. You may laugh up your sleeves, as your saying goes, at such a belief, but . . .”

“No, Rajah, nothing was further from my

* Prime Minister.

mind. I have seen enough of the East to respect other religions as well as my own."

"But, Major, as I was about to say, being the last of my line I think you will agree that the sin of dying childless in my case would be more than unpardonable. At any rate, as I have said before, I married again. I am very much attached to my third wife, and when I tell you that she is shortly to become a mother you will realise my deep concern more fully.

"My State Physician advises abortion in the child's interests, so you can see he believes that the Rani, at any rate, cannot live. In a week or so, or a fortnight at the most, she is due to become a mother; it is therefore possible that if I accepted his suggestion the child would live. I might say, my heir would live. Because according to my horoscope the child will be a son.

"But for how long would he live, Major? Children of a third wife when they have no mother to watch over them have an unfortunate habit of kicking the buckets, as your saying goes. It is not given to man to alter his nature and much less is it given to woman to alter hers. Our women are no less jealous than the ladies of your own race, and so you see I must place my trust in God."

The Rajah paused for a moment and then went on: "If it be God's will that she should die I must accept the verdict and console myself with the thought that it is Kismet."

"Well, Rajah, I think you've called me in very

late. If the Rani has had high fever for over a week it would only have been fair to call me in before."

"I did not think of it before, Major. I only heard this morning that when my wife went out on her last drive about a week ago she met one of your soldiers—I think perhaps he was a little drunk!—I believe that when he saw the drawn curtains of the closed carriage in which she was driving, he shouted out an unseemly remark, and the Rani, cautiously raising the curtains a little in order to ascertain who was insulting her, received a shock. The man was making the most hideous grimaces, and immediately on her return to the Palace she retired to rest.

The next morning she had high fever, and my State Physician is now convinced that no one but a European can break the spell."

Garfield shrugged his shoulders as he remarked :

"A case of the evil eye, Rajah? You know, we don't believe in that."

"I know you do not, but I am quite ready to take my State Physician's word for it. You see, I am, as I think you once expressed it yourself, Major, a curious mixture of Western civilisation and Eastern superstition."

"I can't remember saying anything of the kind. I've only seen you on one or two occasions, and I certainly wouldn't make a statement of that kind to you, no matter what I thought."

"I am not saying, Major, that you said it to me; but I hope you will not distress yourself

on that account, for I do not think the judgment you passed illogical. Considering that I am an Indian and was educated in England I fail to see how I could be otherwise. I may tell you, Major, in confidence—and there is no other member of the Ghurumpur Club to whom I would speak so candidly—that any remark made about me or my State in your Club, in the hearing of any of my people, reaches my ears sooner or later.”

Garfield looked at him in surprise.

“That should not astonish you. To hear what other people have to say about me does no harm, it tends to make me humble, and you must not think that, because you used that expression during a discussion at the club, I resent it in any way. I should not have asked you to help me in my present difficulty if I thought that you meant anything derogatory in the judgment you passed.”

Reminded by this latter remark of the reason for the interview, Garfield asked if it would be convenient for him to see the Rani without any further delay.

“I am afraid, Major, that cannot be.”

“But how can I prescribe for her without seeing her?”

“I think, Major, any medicine that you prescribe will be quite efficacious. It will, I am sure, break the spell.”

“So you’re relying on me to cast out an evil spirit? That’s what it amounts to?”

“Quite so, Major.”

"Then I'm afraid you're wasting your time and mine. I have no psychic powers of that kind. I am only what you would call a medicine man. My training has taught me that certain symptoms are associated with certain diseases, and that certain medicines, by inducing an action opposite to the disease it is sought to cure, are beneficial. In the Rani's case I could do no more than prescribe such medicines as are indicated after I have seen her."

"I am afraid, Major, as I have said before, you cannot see the Rani. You will be permitted to interview her if that be necessary, but there will be a curtain between you, and of course I shall be present. Even our State Physician is not allowed to see the Rani. But I join issue with you when you say you have no psychic powers. Many people possess them without knowing it. You have made some wonderful cures and our people believe that you have the power of casting out the evil eye."

Garfield could not restrain a smile.

"You may be amused, Major, but there is something in our belief. Whether your medicine is the instrument through which you exercise your power, I know not, and, obviously, you yourself are just as much in the dark as I am in this matter. But you have made some miraculous cures ; cures which other doctors could not effect. I have heard it said that you cured Captain Forsythe with the same medicine which Colonel Goodfellow was giving him, but until it was

taken in your presence he was gradually getting worse. And when you cast out the evil spirit he was practically a dying man."

"Well, if you don't mind, I think the sooner I have an interview with the Rani the better," said Garfield, now convinced that it was useless to attempt to counter such fantastic arguments. "But I'm afraid my diagnosis will be extremely difficult. If the Rani is so seriously ill, would it not be better to face a slight infraction of your rules in her interests? I've known other Indian gentlemen who have waived their objections when I've pointed out that it was a matter of life and death."

"There you make a mistake, Major. In Ghurumpur there are many orthodox Hindus who could break caste rules with impunity. They and their wives could get back their caste by doing pujah * but in my position it would be impossible. The higher one's caste, the higher one's station in life, the greater one's riches, the more severe are the penalties."

Garfield's inclination was to press the point, but the recollection of the rumour that the Rajah's whole outlook on life had been soured, owing to the necessity for regaining caste following on his education in England, and the sight of his stern unrelenting face, convinced him that argument would be useless.

"Very well, I suppose I must do my best under

* The ritual to be observed to regain caste

the conditions you lay down. But as I've told you I'm rather pushed for time."

"In that case Major, you are at liberty to depart. The Rani's horoscope makes it quite clear that in all crises the most favourable times for important decisions are an hour after noon and an hour after midnight. It is now only a little after twelve."

Again Garfield resigned himself to the inevitable, and, anxious to divert the conversation into less debatable channels, seized on a previous remark which the Rajah had made.

"You said that every word uttered in the Ghurumpur club concerning you or your State is carried back to you. Is that really so?"

"Most decidedly. And not only that, Major, but the movements or anticipated movements of your officials are known to me, within a very few minutes of a decision being made."

"Within a few minutes? Why, it would take a messenger two hours to reach here! You're not going to tell me that you have a secret wireless in operation?"

The Rajah gave a deprecating laugh. "Oh no, Major, my High Priest would not allow such a thing. We have our own method of transmitting news. We have had it from time immemorial, and I have very good reason to be thankful. Do you remember when Gokul Rao, that contemptuous, petty Zemindar* who was always making trouble between me and the authorities, lost his

* Landowners.

life ? And the police trumped up a ludicrous charge that I had instigated and witnessed the murder ? ”

“ Oh yes ! I remember it very well. It's always puzzled me how the Police Inspector could have made such a silly mistake. Why, you were actually with the Deputy Commissioner at the time the man was murdered, weren't you ? ”

“ Well, Major, perhaps the Inspector of Police was not so much to blame after all. You see, in Birabad I have a double, and it is quite possible that the man impersonated me. Gokul Rao was a most truculent fellow and had many enemies. I am sorry to say that by means of false evidence he obtained one or two important decisions against me in the Courts, and my Diwan suggested that the only way of getting evens with him was to give him a damn good licking. Unfortunately, however, he was a very wealthy fellow.”

“ An unpardonable sin, I suppose ! ” said Garfield with a chuckle.

“ Oh, he was a most sinful fellow, Major ! And so cunning that I agreed with my Diwan that the time had come to mete out justice with a stick. So I arranged with my double to procure the services of some half dozen badmashies * and to hold them in readiness to come here at a moment's notice. Then I bided my time, awaiting an opportunity to pay off old scores. Un-

* Bad characters.

fortunately Gokul Rao was too cunning, and keeping so many badmashies in idleness was a rather expensive proceeding, huh ? ”

Garfield looked amused. He was hardly prepared for what was coming.

“ Well, Major, you can see something had to happen. And as a wish is often father to a thought a dacoity* was committed in the neighbourhood of Gahar, and, strangely enough, suspicion fell on the innocent scoundrel, Gokul Rao ! The despicable crime was of such a serious nature that the Deputy Commissioner decided to proceed to Gahar to hold a local enquiry. Fortunately I heard of his intention in time, and my double whom I suspect had a finger in the pie and was staying in a neighbouring village, suggested that it was my duty to go to Gahar and pay my respects to the Deputy Commissioner. I knew that Gokul Rao had been summoned to present himself at the Deputy Commissioner’s camp at nine o’clock that same evening, and as I did not wish to meet the fellow I set out in my palki† with the intention of arriving at Gahar half an hour earlier.

I wore my Court robes and the Luchmi diamond in my turban, and when I arrived about half-past eight the Deputy Commissioner showed his kindness by receiving me at once.”

“ Of course he would, Rajah.”

“ Not necessarily. You see, he had a very important engagement. However, I found him

* Robbery with violence. † A coach-built litter.

exceedingly pleasant. He offered me a cigar, and for a time we smoked and talked. Suddenly he pulled out his watch and I gathered from his looks that I was outstaying my welcome. It was a quarter past nine, so I rose to go. I was just on the point of saying goodbye when the butler entered to say that the Inspector of Police wanted a word in the Deputy Commissioner's private ear. He left me, with a hurried apology, and joined the Inspector outside the tent.

Imagine my consternation, Major, when I heard the Inspector say that Gokul Rao had been hammered to death by badmashies in *my presence*. And when questioned about it he was most emphatic in his assertion that I was there and was wearing the Luchmi diamond in my turban."

The Rajah looked at Garfield inquisitively, but the latter, who had suddenly thrown one leg over the other, had his eyes fixed on his boot which he was tapping with his riding whip.

"Well, Major," the Rajah continued, after a pause of a few seconds, "you could have dropped me with feathers, as your saying goes! I could hardly believe my ears! And I heard the Deputy Commissioner say: 'Murdered!—By the Rajah of Kohajulia? What are you talking about!'

"'It is the truth, your Honour,' the Inspector replied.

"I waited breathlessly. I thought the Deputy Commissioner would tell him then and there that I was in the tent. But there was no moths on him, as your saying goes.

“ ‘ At what time, Inspector, did this happen,’ he demanded sharply.

“ ‘ About fifteen minutes ago, Your Honour. A few minutes before nine, when he was on the way to attend the enquiry.’

“ Then I thought it time to intervene. I emerged from the tent and, pointing to my nearly finished cigar to let the crowd which had gathered know what perjurers Inspectors can be, I said : ‘ Why, Inspector Babu, I have been with His Honour, the Deputy Commissioner, nearly an hour. Are you not ashamed to tell such infamous lies ? ’

“ Then, of course, you could have dropped *him* with feathers. The Deputy Commissioner seemed dumbfounded, and the next minute the Inspector was cringing and muttering all sorts of apologies. But I was having no back-chat with such a low scoundrel. I made an obeisance to the Deputy Commissioner and left the Inspector to make the best of the mess he was in. Of course, after this nothing he said was believed. He tried to make out that I was responsible for the dacoity, but the Deputy Commissioner satisfied himself that Gokul Rao had instigated the dacoity and his death was the outcome of an act of revenge.

“ But it was a long time, Major, before I could get over my indignation. It was the first time in my life that any Police Inspector had tried to trump a up charge against me. But that corrupt official was always glove in hand with that fellow, Gokul Rao. I strongly suspect he took money from him, for my Diwan had always maintained

that it was the influence of the Inspector Babu which lost me my cases."

"Isn't it a case of the pot calling the kettle black?" said Garfield with cutting sarcasm.

"Ah, Major, that is a very good saying of yours. We are all pots and kettles in this world. But to continue. I had more reason to be indignant when I got back to the Raj-Koti.* You will hardly believe me, Major, when I tell you that the paste duplicate of the Luchmi diamond and my spare set of State robes had been borrowed by that scoundrel from Birabad. And that is not all, Major. The badmashies who accompanied that arch-mischief maker ran away with a thousand rupees which I had most carelessly left on my table." The Rajah sighed, as though the loss were irreplaceable. "But no matter, on second thoughts I would willingly have paid that amount to get rid of Gokul Rao, and almost as much to get rid of the Inspector. For that dacoity killed two birds with one stone. The Inspector, I am glad to say, was dismissed the service for attempting to bring a false charge against me."

"You mean to say," said Garfield, almost beside himself with astonishment and disgust. "that the dacoity and the plot to *murder* Gokul Rao were hatched here? And that you were a party to it? Why, if I told the Deputy Commissioner it would have very serious consequences."

"No, Major, you must not draw wrong conclusions. Coincidences do not prove culpability. Besides, I have only been telling you a tale. Shall I say a tale from the Arabian Nights, just as you, say, to pass the time. But it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and the present Inspector is most favourably disposed towards me, in spite of the fact that he occasionally writes disparaging remarks about myself and my Diwan to his Superintendent. That is sometimes necessary, you will understand ; for the present Superintendent has a peculiar habit of transferring Inspectors who are favourably disposed to people in my position. However, my Diwan sees the reports before they are sent, for the Inspector is somewhat stupid and might put his feet in it if we did not insist on editing his reports."

"What would you say if I repeated all you've said to the Deputy Commissioner ?" said Garfield challengingly, scarcely able to give credence to the story.

"Oh, there is no objection ! He would only laugh at you. You Englishmen do not take your sayings seriously. But there is one I would commend for its accuracy. . . . 'One half of the world does not know how the other half lives.'

"But come ! It is time to interview the Rani, and I know I can rely on your services in spite of the contempt you have for my poor attempt to entertain you. You, Major, know the East, you also know you cannot alter it. That is why I have confided to you this ludicrous episode in my career."

CHAPTER VIII

THE Rajah led the way up the great central staircase and, turning to the left, traversed a wide balcony leading to the arched doorway of the Zenana, where stood two stalwart door-keepers with huge sinister-looking daggers thrust through their belts.

Passing through the doorway Garfield found himself in a lofty spacious apartment, divided into two parts by a bamboo chick, the upper portion of which was screened by a heavy cloth purdah.

The chick had no lining, but Garfield saw at a glance that the lighting of the room and the purdah and chick were so arranged that the Zenana side was in deep shadow.

The large glazed skylight in the ceiling on the entrance side of the purdah flooded that portion of the room with light, enabling the occupants of the Zenana to see without being seen.

The furniture of the room was thoroughly Indian in character. Exquisitely coloured and designed Persian carpets covered the marble floor, and a heavily carved octagonal table stood

in the centre. In the four corners majestic palms sent their broad leaves fanlike towards the ceiling; a divan with brilliant scarlet cushions and trappings stood against one side of the room.

Two uncomfortable-looking armchairs, somewhat resembling thrones, were placed one at each side of the table. On the table itself was a handsomely chased gold mounted hookah* with a carved and gold inlaid cocoanut bowl, a small brazier containing charcoal with a spirit lamp underneath, obviously of English manufacture, and a repoussé silver Delhi tobacco box.

The Rajah waved Garfield to a seat and, throwing himself upon the divan, clapped his hands.

A few minutes later there were sounds of movement on the other side of the purdah, and the Rajah, leaning towards the Doctor, murmured in low tones :

“The Rani’s litter has come.”

Garfield’s interview with the patient was most unsatisfactory. It was quite evident from her feeble voice and somewhat rambling talk that she was in a very serious condition, and such questions as he asked were obviously answered by an attendant dhai.†

More often than not the leading questions which he asked remained unanswered, and the replies to those that were answered were so ambiguous and interlarded with so much qualification that he could do little more than obtain a superficial idea of the Rani’s symptoms.

* An Indian pipe without a smoke stem. † Nurse-widwife.

He suspected diphtheria as well as malaria but was not certain and, although he closely questioned the dhai to ascertain when the first symptoms of a sore throat appeared, the answer he received was more enigmatical than ever ; and it was with a puzzled frown that he terminated the interview.

Following the Rajah, he returned to the reception room where the former had entertained him on his first arrival.

" I suppose, Major, you are anxious to go back now ? "

" Yes, I can do no good by staying."

" And you will send some medicine ? "

" Look here, Rajah, I think this is all nonsense ! I haven't the faintest idea as to the nature of the Rani's illness. That dhai is an absolute fool, she couldn't give a straight answer to a single question ! How on earth can I prescribe when I don't know what's wrong ? "

" Major, there you make a mistake. That dhai is a very experienced woman ; my State Physician will tell you so. If you like you can see her now."

" I don't think it would do any good. I shall have to think things over."

" But you will send some medicine, Major ? I lay great store by that."

Garfield hesitated a moment, but the Rajah's face reflected such deep concern that he added :

" Oh yes. I'll send something along."

"That is good, Major. But I have detained you too long. The car is waiting for you."

Garfield rose to depart, not quite sure how to take leave of the Rajah. He felt he could not offer the man his hand after listening to that tale about Gokul Rao, and, furthermore, he was impatient with his obstinacy.

It was therefore with no little relief that he noticed the Rajah showed no intention of proffering his hand. He stood there, proud and erect, with a suspicion of contempt flickering in his eyes, and then, signifying his intention to accompany Garfield to the waiting car, he passed out of the room.

But a little later, when the car was starting on its journey, the contempt faded from the Rajah's eyes, and it was with a respectful obeisance that he bade his visitor goodbye.

* * *

The feeling of contempt for himself which Garfield had experienced when listening to the Rajah's tale might have been dissipated had he overheard the conversation which passed between the Rajah and the Diwan after his departure. . . .

"I am afraid I shocked him, Diwan ?"

The Diwan, hoary of head, wise of eye, feeble of body, smiled enigmatically.

"You like him, Your Highness ?"

"Not yet, I trust him, that is all. And there are very few foreigners I trust."

"Will he talk ?" There was a ring of caution in the Diwan's voice.

“I think not, Diwan. I believe he is the foreigner who, according to my horoscope, is to be instrumental in placing my progeny firmly on the gudda. What does it say? On the thirteenth day of this month when, in trouble and tribulation, my House is passing under the evil influence of Saturn, a traveller will pass my portals a few minutes before the sun is at its zenith. Trust that traveller, so my horoscope says, and he will save my House, provided I let him know what manner of man I am. . . . The Major came at ten minutes to noon and, if he is the messenger of the Goddess Kali, we may expect another visit from him to-night.”

“I thought, Your Highness, there was a difference of opinion on the point! You know the holy Fakir hinted that the traveller might be a woman.”

“Well, we shall not have long to wait; another twelve hours will decide. And now I will go and do penance, for surely my affliction is the result of Kali's displeasure. And at the time of the setting of the sun I have arranged to visit Her temple in state to offer a blood sacrifice to propitiate Her anger. I shall count on your presence, Diwan. Will you see that the necessary arrangements are made.”

* * *

Meanwhile Garfield proceeded on his journey. He recalled his promise to send back a bottle of medicine, but for the life of him he could not make up his mind whether to treat the fever

or the suspected diphtheria. He had formed the opinion that the sore throat was a recent development. Should he send a harmless mixture, and wait until more pronounced symptoms showed themselves, or should he take timely action and somehow contrive to give the Rani an injection of anti-toxine? The obstinacy of the Rajah, however, stood in the way, and also there was the difficulty of training the dhai in the use of a hypodermic syringe.

But all the time two thoughts were uppermost in his mind,—that he had not paid his last visit to the Raj-Koti, and that before many hours were over he would receive a summons to attend again.

“I suppose I’m a fool to get annoyed over matters of this kind,” he thought. “Many doctors would feel an inward satisfaction at being called to attend the Rani!”

It would induce other native magnates to open their doors to allopathic medicine (for Garfield was a staunch believer in the system of medicine in which he had been trained), quite apart from the fee accompanied by presents which would be offered.

“But there’s one thing I won’t do, that’s touch the Rajah’s money or accept a present!” His thoughts rambled on. “Damn these silly caste rules! In a case of serious illness like this, you’d think they’d have the sense to suspend them altogether, but natives only do things by halves. They’ll take medicine which you’ve handled and

made up, when in health they wouldn't take a drop of water from a glass you'd touched. They let their wives take the medicine, yet the real orthodox native wouldn't let you see her or feel her pulse for untold gold."

Then his thoughts reverted to the tale the Rajah had told him.

"It's a bit of an eye-opener to think that a Rajah like Kohajulia even with all his power, can carry on in such a way under the very nose of English officials. I suppose he was right when he said the Deputy Commissioner wouldn't believe the story, and I'm damned if I can hardly credit it myself!"

* * *

It was in this complex state of mind that Garfield dispensed a bottle of medicine, a harmless mixture of some sort; the kind that is known in hospitals as "A.D.T." mixture, and for this reason he did not enter it in the Hospital diary.

As a matter of fact he was so preoccupied when dispensing it, that had he been asked five minutes afterwards what he had dispensed he would have been at a loss to give the prescription. All he knew was that it was harmless and slightly anti-pyretic, and that knowledge sufficed for the moment.

CHAPTER IX

HUGH GARFIELD left the dinner table in a great hurry. His mind had been so much occupied with the events of the morning, the Rajah's obstinacy, and his wife's petulance, that he had forgotten that the play "If Poobah had a Harem" was to be staged that evening.

He had been reminded of it by the conversation which had taken place during the meal. Mr. Sinclair began it by asking if he knew who was to take the part of Poobah, and Garfield had to admit he did not know, for the matter had apparently been kept a dead secret.

At the rehearsals Major Monteith, who had taken over the duties of Cantonment Magistrate, had read the part, but on the bills which had been posted throughout the Station, not with a view so much to advertise the play as to give it a professional air, the announcement was made that the part of "Poobah" was to be taken by the "One and only original Poobah." Rumour had it that a certain High Court Judge from Bala-habad who, unknown to himself, was nicknamed Poobah, was to assume the role.

He was known as an amateur actor of no mean calibre, and rumour also said that he had been induced to take the part by a certain fascinating lady.

Certain it was that the lady in question was now staying with the Tomlinsons, and the High Court Judge had arrived by car that afternoon for the ostensible purpose of inspecting the District Courts.

But what did appear on the bills, and in very conspicuous type, was that "Sheik Abdul Karim Garfield, Son of Nimshi" was to take the part of "THE AYAH!"

The announcement was not only printed in large type but in blue letters that caught the eye, and everyone in Ghurumpur laughed loud and long when the bills appeared. It was significant that their appearance coincided with Major Garfield's absence at Gahar.

No one enquired who was responsible for such a questionable but priceless joke, because there was a strong suspicion that Oldham would have denied the accusation if he had been tackled, and, though many in the Station questioned its good taste, there were few who failed to appreciate the wit.

Among the few were Mrs. Sinclair, because she knew that her friend felt the sting of it, and Vivienne herself, because she could not banish from her mind the vision of a fair woman with a black baby at her breast.

Although Hugh had not seen the notices, and

was unaware of Vivienne's visit to Mrs. Bell, he felt that he was more out of tune with his wife than ever, and, making his apologies to his hostess, he left the table as soon as a suitable opportunity occurred, advancing the excuse that it would take him some time to change.

He looked at Vivienne hoping to catch her eye. She had avoided him ever since his return about two o'clock, and he wanted to have a word with her. She appeared, however, deeply engrossed in a conversation with Mrs. Sinclair, and it was not until he had completed his change that she entered his dressing room, too late for any intimate talk.

"I don't think I need put any stain on my face, do you, Vivienne? I'm not quite dark enough for a Madrassie ayah, but I've seen Goanese ayahs almost as fair as I am."

Poor Vivienne, who had been fighting her hysteria all day, sat on the bed and gave way to a paroxysm of laughter. Her husband, who had shaved off his moustache, stood in front of her garbed in the dress of a native woman, looking the image of one! And there he was talking about ayahs being almost as fair as he! Was there to be no end of her torture? Fair! She heard someone whispering another word in her ear, and the voice had the taunting ring of Oldham's.

Hugh, whose professional instincts were aroused, greeted the outburst as he would have greeted that of anyone bordering on hysteria.

"Now then, Vivienne, stop this nonsense!

If you're going to behave like that you'd better go to bed."

His words had a transient but instantaneous effect; for a moment she stopped laughing but, as he approached her, the swaying of his sari resembled the waddling movements of the ayah she had seen at the house of the black baby, and she drew in her breath with a spasmodic gasp.

Hugh, who was watching her carefully, recognised another symptom of hysteria. If he did not speak soon he might have a laughing and crying distraught woman to deal with. There was only one thing to do,—upbraid her.

Sternly he attacked her for avoiding him in the afternoon, poured scorn on her incapacity to fight her own battles, and Vivienne, who saw the determined look on his face, quailed and sobered instantly. But what she did not see was the hidden emotion behind those hard words, and that the man who was speaking to her in such a way had racked his heart in the effort.

"How dare you speak to me like that!" she retorted indignantly.

For an infinitesimal part of a second Hugh wavered. He was tempted to take his hysterical nerve-strained wife in his arms and tell her how he had had to steel himself to speak such hard words, and the anguish of mind their utterance caused him, but he knew the danger. He was still watching over her as he had watched over her ever since their arrival in India, continually on the *qui vive* to smooth away her difficulties

and to temporise until she got "used to things."

In a way he partly understood her highly strung nature ; not only as a physician but also as a lover. Now his professional instincts predominated, and he continued to speak in hard unrelenting tones. The words which came from his lips were accompanied by impatient gestures until the risk of a relapse had passed by. And when he was satisfied that she was quite normal again he went into her room, and stood in front of the cheval glass to ask himself the question which it had been his original intention to ask her.

Satisfied with his appearance he turned to Vivienne, who had followed him, and was astonished at the look on her face.

There was no sign of the hysteria of a few minutes earlier. Thoroughly calm and self-possessed she looked him up and down, while the colour faded from her cheeks, and into her eyes there crept a look which puzzled him. They had suddenly become dull and listless, and there was something in them of fear and something of revulsion.

"What's the matter, Vivienne ?"

"I don't know, Hugh, that is . . ." She gave a sigh. "I can't say. You look to me just like Mrs. Sinclair's ayah, only taller."

She spoke like an outsider passing a critical judgment. There was no suggestion in her voice that the examined and examiner were husband and wife, or that there was any bond between them save that which her look expressed. But

as she spoke she kept her eyes fixed on him, looking him up and down, taking in every detail.

Her gaze somehow disconcerted him, and to relieve the tension between them, the outcome, as he thought of his harsh words, he decided to leave at once.

“You’ll come along with the Sinclairs later, Vi, won’t you?”

“Yes, I mean to see it through.”

Hugh would not have been surprised if she had refused to come, yet if he had been asked why, he would have been at a loss to give a convincing explanation.

CHAPTER X

THE play was a brilliant success. The large ballroom of the club had filled to overflowing and, on account of Major Garfield's popularity with the subordinate officials of the Station and the railway, they and their wives, their sons and daughters, had flocked to see the Doctor act. The curtain finally fell amid tumultuous applause and vociferous cries of "Ayah! Ayah!"

Three times Major Garfield took the curtain alone, and even Oldham's antipathy momentarily melted.

At his third appearance Oldham lost all control of himself and shouted:

"Three cheers for Sheik Abdul Karim Garfield!"

The roar of laughter which greeted this remark produced from the "Ayah" an approving bow. The spontaneity of Oldham's call robbed it of any sting it might otherwise have had, and the Doctor would have been more than human if he had remained unresponsive to such a popular ovation, for cheer after cheer rang through the room again and again.

As he retired the curtain was drawn aside for the whole company to share in the triumph ; but the applause, though hearty and spontaneous, was of a more orderly character, for everybody in the room knew that it was Major Garfield's acting which had made the play such a success. His extemporary asides were too mirth-provoking to be resisted.

In the second act where a planter sent in his card to Poobah with the request that he wished to see the Judge on a high matter of State, Poobah, according to his rôle, examined the card carefully and said in puzzled tones : " A planter, ayah ? What is a *planter* ? " and the ayah was supposed to reply : " Must be grave digger, My Lord." But when Garfield, dropping the mannerisms and speech of an ayah, replied with a drawl : " Oh, a planter ? He's a Johnny who helps himself twice to fish ! " the house was convulsed, and even Oldham was tickled. He saw no reflection on himself in the insinuation and laughed louder than anyone.

As a result of his asides, Garfield blossomed in a new light, and there were some in the audience who came to the conclusion that perhaps after all they did not know their doctor.

Vivienne, who was sitting by the side of Mrs. Sinclair, felt a personal share in the triumph.

" You didn't know, Vi,"—these two women had now become mutual friends " that your husband was such a favourite, did you ? "

" I don't think I quite realised it, Alice." She

felt the black clouds had suddenly lifted, but fate ordained that the change was to be a transitory one.

The curtain was falling again and, as the applause died down, she heard Cosgrave, sitting in the row behind, speaking in a rather loud whisper to Oldham.

"I thought you didn't like Garfield?"

"I don't. Can't stand tar at any price! But one must give him credit for being able to act, and having the courage to do it. I'll offer him a job when I'm married!"

Although Vivienne was no more capable of seeing behind her than anyone else she could imagine the nudge which followed Oldham's remark, and knew that Cosgrave was drawing his companion's attention to her presence; and the red cheeks of Mrs. Sinclair told a similar tale.

There was a titter of laughter behind and Vivienne turned round suddenly to see Cosgrave stuffing a handkerchief into his mouth while tears of laughter rolled down his cheeks, and Oldham looking preternaturally grave. The clouds were gathering again.

* * *

After the performance the information was passed from mouth to mouth that the string band of the South Lancashire Regiment, which had acted as orchestra, was to play dance music, and the mess were to be hosts for the night.

Volunteers were called for to remove the chairs

and in a few minutes the bandsmen were taking their places on the platform.

Mrs. Sinclair, with Vivienne at her side, and surrounded by a group of high officials and their wives, was carrying on an animated conversation with great tact, hoping to draw her friend into it, but Vivienne was too occupied with her thoughts.

She was waiting anxiously for her husband to appear and claim the first dance. She meant to circle the room once or twice and then, seeking some sheltered sitting out place, have a heart to heart talk with him.

She was determined that the insinuations of Oldham should cease, and she was going to propose that as soon as they got into their own bungalow she should invite him to dinner and thresh the matter out.

But she would have to know first whether Hugh had a touch of the tar. Her future course of action depended on her knowing the truth.

Well aware that Oldham admired her, she felt she could influence him. If the insinuations were not justified her task would be easy. If they were, well, she would, without giving Hugh away, strike a bargain with Oldham, giving him the choice of her enmity or respect. She had little doubt he would choose the latter, and she felt convinced that he, in his turn, could keep a check on his friend's tongue.

The band was now tuning instruments, preparatory to playing a waltz which the Band Sergeant had announced from the stage, and

Vivienne noticed with apprehension that her companions were booking the first dance. Would Hugh never come ?

"Mrs. Garfield, will you dance this with me ?"

There was no tone of supplication or anxiety in Oldham's voice and, in spite of his previous rudeness, she could not help liking the man. The fascination he exercised was gathering strength.

"Not this one, but . . ." She got no further.

Hugh was wending his way towards her, and the horror of it !—He was still in the garb of an ayah !

She could hardly believe her eyes. She did not know that he was coming to give her a satisfactory reason for not changing. She imagined he was so overwhelmed with his success that he wanted to shine in its reflected glory for the rest of the evening. "So he was vainglorious as well as a coward !"

Couldn't he see he would be the laughing stock of the whole room ? That he was undermining the popularity he had gained ? She felt as a boy feels when the girl he admires turns up in a hat so conspicuous that he is sure the whole world is laughing at them both.

At that moment the band crashed out the opening bars and, without a moment's hesitation, Vivienne put her hand on Oldham's shoulder and the pair started to sway to the rhythm of the music.

"Vivienne, I thought you would have kept this for me ?"

"No, Hugh."

They had circled a few feet away from him, and that fact galvanised him to activity. With a few strides he caught them up.

Vivienne! This is my dance and I mean to have it!" There was a compelling ring in his voice.

"No, I'm not going to dance this or any other dance with you—not in that get-up!"

"Well, you won't dance with anyone else, then!" He put his arm round her, and Oldham retired.

Too furious to take any cognisance of the direction in which they were going, Vivienne turned on him at once.

"Can't you see I'm ashamed to be seen with you like this!"

"I didn't mean to claim this dance. I really came to tell you why I was not going to change, and I intended to leave the room immediately; but the sight of that chap, Oldham, and your treatment of me, settled the matter! If you're ashamed to dance with me like this, well, you can just put up with it for once!"

He stopped suddenly as he finished speaking. They had drawn near to Oldham again, and leaving her standing for a moment, she heard him mutter savagely: "You precocious young cub! What the hell d'you mean by butting in when I was coming to speak to my wife?"

Oldham, though inwardly apprehensive, appeared quite unmoved by the outburst and,

giving a shrug of his shoulders which plainly implied that he had a distaste for unseemly argument, smiled contemptuously and sauntered off.

Garfield neither noticed the shrug nor the smile. He feared nothing from Oldham. He was determined to dance that dance with Vivienne and he was prepared to do it if he had to knock down Oldham or anyone else. For the rest, he had no fixed intentions. His mind was too agitated for other thoughts, and, with an energy and savageness which bespoke an elemental male, he rejoined his wife and whirled her through the throng, his tongue only fitted to utter curses.

And then he heard her whisper: "Hugh, I do love you!"

"Have you only just found that out?"

"Yes!" she said tantalisingly; her mind had flown back to the days of their engagement.

"Then you've found it out too late! I didn't want to dance really, I only came to tell you that I have to attend a patient, and I can't tell you what time I shall return."

The music suddenly ceased. Hugh escorted his wife to a seat next to Mrs. Sinclair, and explained that he had to attend an urgent case.

"I don't know when I shall be back, Mrs. Sinclair, but if it's very late I shan't disturb anyone. Vivienne, will you see that the lamp is not put out in my dressing room?"

"Vivienne, if I were you I wouldn't dance too much with Mr. Oldham."

"Why not, Alice?" she demanded in a very "I-shall-do-as-I-please" sort of voice, and she was determined she *would* do as she pleased. She would have every dance with Oldham after this if he wanted her to and, catching sight of the culprit, she beckoned to him.

She was angry with her husband for the way he had left her, but if he thought it was going to spoil her evening, well it was not! She would flirt outrageously; she felt like it, if she didn't she would cry.

"My word, he fairly boiled over, didn't he?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Oldham?" She had begun to play with fire!

"You know what I mean. Does he often flare up like that? I'm afraid you're influencing him for the worse."

"I think, Mr. Oldham, you misjudge my husband. You and I will quarrel if you don't treat him with a little more respect—and I don't want to quarrel with *you*." She was not going to cry!

"Respect?" Oldham gave a cynical laugh. "I'll tell you what I do respect him for!" He had noticed the emphasis she laid on the word "*you*."

Vivienne knew what was coming. She didn't feel the least bit like crying now!

"Well?"

"For bringing to Ghurumpur a very fascinating little charmer."

"Flatterer!" She was forgetting things.

"It's not in my line; nor is hypocrisy."

"What do you mean?"

"You know as well as I do. You know everyone thinks you are.—I wish I were a pretty woman!"

"Aren't you, in some respects?"

Oldham was taken aback; he had expected to be asked his reasons, and he had his answer ready.

"Why are we sitting here? Let's dance."

The pair were in ecstasy as they circled the room. There was no step which Oldham initiated to which Vivienne did not immediately respond. Like a feather on his arm, she seemed to add a lightness to his own steps. Her dancing was no accomplishment but a gift; and he, too, understood the meaning of a dance more than most men. The music transported them to another world and their dancing gave that world reality. There were whispers in the air of youth and romance, and the music caught those whispers, played with them and gave them a meaning which only youth can thoroughly grasp.

The band crashed out the final bars. He felt a light touch on his arm, and it thrilled him more than any touch had ever done.

"You don't think I'm a woman now, do you?" His voice broke the spell.

"I made a mistake—I meant a child."

Oldham, who was certain that the response to his words would have taken another form, felt pulled up sharply, and he was all lighthearted banter again.

"I *am* getting it to-night! There's no one else in the Station I'd have taken that from. However, let it pass, I'm curious. Why am I like a child?"

"Because you show your likes and dislikes like one! Mr. Oldham, I'm going to have this out with you. If we are to be friends you mustn't sneer at Hugh, for——"

"I don't sneer."

"Isn't saying he has a touch of the tar sneering?"

Up to this point Oldham had treated her remarks as somewhat frivolous. He was not sufficiently under her thrall as yet to sacrifice his self-conceit, and in a voice which showed a certain amount of disregard for the issue, he blurted out the challenge:

"The truth isn't sneering!"

"And you think I don't know my husband's people, and all about him?"

It somehow struck Oldham that a woman who could mention the word tar and her husband in the same breath could have no very deep-rooted affection for him and, still suffering from the sting of the word "cub" which Garfield had hurled at him, his quick temper got the better of him.

"I'm damned sure you don't!"

CHAPTER XI

PASSING through the verandah Garfield called for his tonga and, driving to the dispensary, packed his medical handbag and set out for the Rajah's Palace.

At last he had got to the root of the trouble ! His wife had accepted the verdict that he had black blood in his veins and, as the tonga jogged on its ten mile journey to Kohajulia, he felt an inward satisfaction that he had not tried to convince her to the contrary.

A firm believer in the phrase "*qui s'excuse s'accuse*," he felt it would lower him to defend his position even to his own wife in her present state of mind. He would not have listened to insinuations against her even if George Washington himself had uttered them ! He could not understand how his own wife could believe that he had a touch of the tar simply because of a few loose remarks made by irresponsible persons like Oldham, and because he had acted an ayah's part. Couldn't she see the refutation in his assumption of the rôle ? Stung by these thoughts

and goaded by her behaviour, he determined more than ever not to excuse himself.

If she did not believe in his Spanish ancestors, well, he could play a waiting game as long as anyone. He had won her from a host of admirers by keeping his own counsel. He had allowed her to do as she wished during the period of their engagement without even once pleading his own interests. He had won her love, and he was certain that that love was not dead and would never die, unless he showed her that he was afraid of losing it.

The self-discipline he had exercised ever since his schooldays had taught him that hidden strength was the most powerful. A keen observer throughout life, the attitude of his friends had made him wise and taught him that a man who loses his wife's love, loses it because he makes himself too cheap, or because, in his selfishness, he ceases to woo when he has conquered. He intended to do none of these things.

* * *

This night ride to Kohajulia was no mad caprice undertaken on the spur of the moment. The fact that no one had recognised him, when he first put in an appearance at the club just after dinner, had given Garfield an idea.

The condition of the Rani distressed him ; not because she was a Rani, but because there was a life to save. Consequently, his professional interests finally triumphed over other considerations. So, as the night progressed, and after

turning things over and over in his mind, he had come to the conclusion that, in the guise of a native woman, he would probably succeed in gaining access to the Zenana, which was now his fixed intention.

He was a man who seldom thought out beforehand a cut and dried programme. The broad outlines of the path he intended to tread he more or less mapped out, but left the details to be filled in later, trusting to an innate resourcefulness to surmount such obstacles as might arise. On this occasion, beyond a hazy notion that he would present himself at the Palace and demand to see the Rajah, he had no preconceived ideas with regard to the methods he would adopt to ensure success.

He knew, however, that it would be inadvisable to drive straight up to the gates of the Palace, and consequently he kept count of the milestones.

The journey seemed interminable, the bullocks seemed to crawl, and he gave a sigh of relief when at last the sidelights cast their glare on the ninth milestone: he had barely another mile to go.

Telling the driver to stop, he jumped out, and, picking up his medicine case, was on the point of telling the tonga wallah to wait until he returned, when he remembered the Rajah's words: "Anything said about me or my State in the presence of one of my people reaches my ears sooner or later." Would he hear of this escapade? For Garfield had no doubt, although

he had never questioned his tongawallah on the subject, that the man owed allegiance to the Rajah.

If so, the chances were that he would hear sooner than later that the Doctor Sahib, disguised as a native ayah, had been set down at the ninth milestone, and, putting two and two together, it would be an easy matter for him ultimately to discover the trick that had been played on him.

Garfield could not help smiling as he thought of the consternation which would overwhelm the Rajah should his identity ever be disclosed.

"However, 'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,'" he muttered to himself. His immediate concern was to prevent his disguise being penetrated until he had left the Palace.

He was well aware of the risk he ran. If he were discovered in the Palace there was hardly any limit to the indignity and punishment he might have to suffer. And he would have to suffer them without redress.

He knew he would receive little sympathy from the higher authorities if the fact were known that he had deliberately desecrated the sanctity of the Zenana of such a high potentate as the Rajah of Kohajulia.

If he told the tonga wallah to wait until his return the man would no doubt ask how long he was likely to be detained and, immediately he was a free agent, would probably drive on to the Palace and partake of the open hospitality which

the Rajah was known to dispense at all hours. His bullocks would be fed free, and the tonga wallah himself would be invited to join the night servants and smoke the pipe of peace, what time the conversation would sooner or later turn on "the Sahib's mad escapade."

Garfield dared not run such a risk, and so he resorted to subterfuge. Opening his bag, he surreptitiously extracted the hypodermic syringe and the small glass tube of anti-toxine and tucked them into a fold of his sari.

This successfully accomplished, he turned over the contents of the bag as though searching for something, and finally muttered, to give the impression that something had been forgotten: "Damn that Assistant Surgeon!"

Tearing out a leaf from his prescription book he scribbled:—

Dear Das Babu,

Will you please make up a bottle of cholera mixture and send it at once by tonga, in charge of one of the hospital peons, with instructions to wait at the tenth milestone on the main Gahar road.

Folding the chit he reflected on the wisdom of the step he had taken. He had only to cross about a mile of paddy-fields * to strike the main road, and it would throw the Doctor Babu off the scent. But to make assurance doubly sure he expressed regret to the tonga wallah that he had given him wrong directions and now had to walk

* Fields in which rice is grown

across the fields, and added : " Take this to the Doctor Babu and then go home."

" How will Sahib get back ? "

" Oh, that's all right ! The Doctor Babu will send the medicine I require in a tonga, and it can take me back. You can get one, can't you ? "

In other circumstances the tonga wallah would have expatiated on the difficulty of obtaining another tonga at such a late hour, but the alternative—that he should drive back, was unthinkable !

His bullocks would have travelled nearly twenty miles by the time he returned to Ghurumpur, and so he made light of the difficulty, and it was with no little degree of relief that Garfield watched the tonga turn and disappear in the darkness. Then, after waiting a little he continued his journey on foot.

CHAPTER XII

It was a quarter to midnight when the Rajah descended the stairs from the Zenana and, crossing the marble hall, entered the reception room which Garfield had occupied some twelve hours earlier.

Throwing himself on a divan he told Mahabir to prepare his hookah. Presently a servant entered carrying a large Benares tray on which stood a brazier, the Rajah's gold-mounted hookah and the repoussé tobacco box.

Opening the box while the servant stood motionless, Mahabir, very slowly and methodically as became the dignity of a confidential servant, extracted a lump of treacly-looking native tobacco, rolled it into a ball between the palms of his hands and, after pressing it into the pipe, took from the brazier a piece of live charcoal and placed it on top of the tobacco. Then, blowing the charcoal until the tobacco sizzled and gave off a faint blue smoke, he handed the hookah to the Rajah and salaamed.

Cupping his hands over the hole the Rajah took a long draw. The water in the cocoanut

bowl bubbled as he inhaled. After repeating the operation some half dozen times he leant back languidly and murmuring: "Good" handed the pipe to Mahabir.

"Have I your permission, Maharajah Bahadur?"

"Of course, Mahabir, brother."

Mahabir, although an inferior official in the Rajah's household, was by reason of his caste, in some respects of equal, if not of higher, standing than the Rajah. They were both Brahmins,* but Mahabir belonged to a more exclusive inner circle. For there are degrees in each caste which give some members more prestige than others.

Mahabir, after inhaling, replaced the hookah on the tray and turning to the servant dismissed him with the words: "Good! Now go."

The Rajah, thoroughly contented and at ease, conversed with Mahabir in low tones.

"You see, Mahabir, I have put on my State robes. Do you know why?"

"I know you are expecting an honoured guest. But more than this, what does your poor servant know?"

"I am expecting the Doctor Sahib. You know, our House is passing through a great crisis and, according to my horoscope, a messenger of the Deity will visit me shortly after midnight. I have given orders to the Captain of my Troops to do all honour to the Doctor Sahib when he comes. For I think he is the messenger whom the

* The highest caste in India.

Goddess Kali will send. The Diwan and I have had an argument about it, but I am sure I am right."

"The greatest Rajah of all Rajahs is always right!"

"It is strange that our Goddess renders my House succour at the hands of a foreigner, but does it not show how powerful is the Holy One? That She can make even the proud Englishmen Her servants?"

"Truly She is a great and mighty Goddess!"

"Yes, Mahabir, Her ways are incomprehensible. It is written in my horoscope that the succour which my House will receive will be at the hands of 'one of the despised.' His Excellency, the Diwan, thinks that the messenger will be a woman, and of course I cannot be quite certain that it is the Doctor Sahib whom I await. For His Excellency rightly points out that we despise a woman. In every way she is an inferior being, but I do not think that the astrologer who drew our my horoscope would have used the word 'despised' in connection with a woman. I hold that the word is a little too strong. What thinkest thou, brother?"

"Truly, O Great One, I cannot think it is a woman, for if Kali sent a woman she would be in Her likeness, and one cannot despise an image of the Goddess."

"You speak well! It *will* be the Doctor Sahib. Go thou and see that on his arrival our dignity is maintained."

Mahabir, dispensing with the obeisance which, had there been anyone else present, he would have been the first to render, retired and took up a position at the entrance doors.

* * *

The few Household troops which the Government allowed the Rajah of Kohajulia to maintain—a mere handful, grotesquely uniformed, and armed with obsolete rifles bored smooth—had been ordered for sentry duty. But, having no very clearly conceived ideas about such duties, they were congregated under a large mango tree, growing on the opposite side of the road facing the main entrance, ostensibly for the purpose of receiving final instructions.

But the rank and file, squatting on their haunches, were dividing attention between the instructions which their Captain was giving, and the gossip which Kalinath Mukerjee (the local wit) was recounting in tones only a little less vibrant than those of the Captain himself. The two harangues being punctuated by an occasional “Ha Gee!”* to encourage their Captain, and suppressed titters as Kalinath Mukerjee, with a face like putty, shot his arrows of wit.

All were happy in the thought that they could not be taken unawares; for at a distance of about a quarter of a mile down the road, in the Ghurumpur direction, one of the sepoy had been stationed to give warning when a vehicle appeared.

* Yes, sir.

He was to imitate the hooting of an owl on the approach of any conveyance, and, after giving the signal, to hide behind the trunk of the nearest tree.

"It's all to be done proper-like," said the Captain. "It would never do for the Sahib to see a sepoy running ahead of his conveyance like a scared hen."

To the Captain, sentry duty meant merely an imposing display. There he stood with the round cap of a cavalry trooper stuck jauntily on his shaved head; a red tunic, purchased in the bazaar and at one time the property of a sergeant major, now embellished with medallions of gold tinsel cut from his wife's sari, was tightly buttoned across his chest and gaped over his pot-bellied paunch. A pair of cotton Jodpur trousers encased his legs, and his shoes, little better than sandals, turning up to a point over the toes and showing his bare heels, added to what *he* felt was the dignity of his appearance.

He had no idea of military duties, let alone tactics and the posting of sentries for ceremonial occasions. No single trooper had been allotted to any particular beat, and the chances were that when a conveyance appeared the score or so of armed men would more resemble a strutting fantastic mannequin parade than the military dignity that the Rajah expected.

The sole reason for his position was that the Captain rented the local cattle pound, waxed

fat on his extortions, and was therefore quite content to give his services free.

"Now, brothers," were his final words—"I think you know your duties. Let me repeat them. When the Sahib's tonga is in sight and our Brother Ram Seeteram gives the owl cry, you hear me give the word of command proper like the Ferengi * Captains—'Fall on!' You then walk with great pomposity up and down in front of the Palace, one after the other, and when you arrive at building's end you walk back. Three or four of you, or more if you like, will march up and down the road. And on Sahib's approach I will give the orders, 'Shunt!' Then, after counting ten, I shall shout: 'Sent arms!' You will place your rifles on the ground and salaam, and if I say 'Hi swine!' and appear in a great rage you will understand I am only imitating Ferengi Sergeants."

The end of his sentence was drowned in a roar of laughter which a remark from Kalnath Mukerjee had produced. This so irritated and confused the Captain that he came to the conclusion it was time to assert his authority and teach Kalinath Mukerjee a lesson.

Scanning the group in front of him and seeing the laughter die suddenly on the cringing face of Seetul Govind, a particularly mild-mannered man, he rounded on him with the ferocity of an enraged bull.

"Govind, you rice-eating devil!" He spoke

the words in English, in the belief that they represented the acme of European insult, and in complete ignorance of the fact that they equally applied to himself. "If you make any more noise while I am instructing my troop I shall dismiss you from the Force! Understand? You offspring of a loose woman!"

Seetul Govind had no time to whine out an apology, for the sound of footsteps startled the group and, in the light of the oil lamp which hung over the gateway of the Palace, they saw an ayah making for the entrance.

CHAPTER XIII

“WHAT are you doing there !”

“I seek audience of His Highness, the Maharajah Bahadur,” the ayah replied, without showing any sign of halting.

“His Highness has no wish to see a person of your besotted character !” retorted the Captain of the Guard, who, apprehensive that he might come in for censure for his failure to intercept such an undesirable visitor, hastened to bar her approach.

But with a fleetness of foot which was disconcerting she evaded the challenge and, quickly passing through the gates of the Palace before the Captain could stop her, she ran to the entrance door only to find her way barred by the agile-looking Mahabir.

“Go away !” the latter shouted, waving his hand in the direction of the roadway. “How dare you approach a Brahmin in the Rajah’s Palace except on your hands and knees !”

“But I have urgent business with the Maharajah Bahadur. Does he not expect a visitor ?”

said the ayah, with a wave of her hand in the direction of the troops.

"He expects the Doctor Sahib, you fool!"

"Nevertheless, I come with a message from the Doctor Sahib."

"What is your message?"

"That, Maharaj," said the ayah—using the title which low caste Hindus adopt when addressing a Brahmin—"I can communicate to no one but His Highness himself."

"Then you'll have to wait till you die! The Maharajah Bahadur does not take messages from anyone through the mouth of an ayah. If you can't give me the message then get out!"

Mahabir's attitude was a threatening one, for a high caste Brahmin feels it an indignity to hold parley with the low caste Indians who serve the English.

"Then tell His Highness that I have the power of casting out the evil eye."

Mahabir was perturbed. He feared the evil eye as much as anyone of his race. He reflected that a woman who claimed to be able to cast it out, might be able of casting it, and he had no wish to court that risk.

"If you will wait here I will acquaint the Maharajah Bahadur with your message," and telling the Captain of the Guard, who by this time had joined them, to take his place, he crossed over to the audience room.

"There is an ayah, Your Highness, who seeks an audience. She says she comes with a message

from the Doctor Sahib Bahadur, and claims to have the power of casting out the evil eye."

"An ayah! To bring a message to me?" said the Rajah incredulously.

"Yes, an ayah, Your Highness."

"Mahabir brother, this may be the messenger of Kali! His Excellency, the Diwan, was perhaps right after all. Show her in. But I will test her by treating her as an ayah. We want no tricks played on us."

Garfield's quick ear caught every word of the conversation and he almost gave a sigh of relief for the cue given him. He knew the rôle to assume. He was the "messenger of Kali."

"So you come with a message from the Doctor Sahib, scum of the earth?" There was an ironical inflection in the Rajah's voice.

"No, Your Highness. I come with no message from the Doctor Sahib with whom I have no concern."

Garfield scanned the Rajah's face eagerly, keenly alert for the slightest sign of recognition. But he had drawn the loose end of his sari well down over his eyes and, by holding the extreme end up to his mouth, had rendered recognition difficult. (A procedure in no way remarkable, for low caste native women cover their faces in an august presence).

"Then, refuse of the gutter, what brings you here? I would have you know that I have an extremely unpleasant way of showing my displeasure towards low-caste offspring of hounds

who force their way into my Raj-Koti! Tell me why I should show consideration to you, O Woman of Loose Morals?"

"Because it is ordained by the Goddess, whose messenger I am, that I shall walk the earth and suffer the vilest of insults as a penance for my evil deeds. And, Maharajah Bahadur, I have wandered over the face of the earth ever since your House was founded, for my sin was indeed great. I am all that you say. But when I have rendered service to your House my days of wandering will be over, and I have journeyed many miles today because the Omnipotent One tells me you have need of me. Behold I am here."

As Garfield finished speaking the gong in the hall chimed one.

"I am not the low caste Hindu woman which my attire suggests; but one who did great injury to your House, for does not all the world know that it was a dancing woman who robbed the first Rajah of Kohajulia of half his lands? That he doomed to death those who thwarted her lightest whim, and that he swore by her mocking eyes? I am that woman!"

"And what is your caste?" asked the Rajah, visibly impressed but still unconvinced.

"That I may not tell."

"Give me some sign that I may know you are a messenger of Kali or I swear by the wanton who wrecked our House that, if you are an imposter, you die!"

"You threaten the Deity when you threaten

me. Is it not enough that you should call The Messenger of Kali the scum of the earth, the refuse of the gutter, the offspring of hounds, that you must add to those insults the threat of death? I cannot die, O Man of Foolish Unbelief! Is it not written in your book of Fate that a Messenger of Kali shall serve you this day? Tarry at your peril, for before the clock strikes again I must set out on my final wandering. Have you, O Son of Clay, need of me?"

CHAPTER XIV

IN spite of the poor light which the native lamp afforded, Garfield perceived the deep effect which his words and acting had produced.

“Dwell not on the insults I have offered you.” The Rajah spoke quietly and with proud dignity. “I uttered them to an ayah, and, O Nameless One, you have given me no sign whereby I may know that you speak the truth.”

“Know this then—” Garfield hesitated, rapidly searching his mind for words which would remove the Rajah’s doubt, when the brilliant idea occurred to him to play on the Rajah’s affection and use a threat.

As the idea struck him he was glad of his hesitation and, born actor that he was, he made full use of it. Lifting his right hand warningly in the air, he continued :

“Know this then,” he paused again, “that as surely as you doubt, so surely shall you and your House die, and she who bears your heir will take her unborn babe to the pyre.”

Then followed perhaps the most interesting moments in Garfield’s life, and he struggled to

suppress an overwhelming elation. For, as though Fate intended to aid him, an agonising wail rang out from the women's quarters.

The effect on the Rajah was electrical. He lost his pride, he lost his dignity, and, jumping to his feet, pressed his hands to his temples in a manner indicative of despair and grief. He knew the meaning of that wail. A second later the dhai rushed headlong into the Rajah's presence, heedless of etiquette and regardless of the consequences.

With head uncovered and hair dishevelled, wild-eyed and inarticulate, she stood there smiting her breasts and waving her hands in the air.

"Speak!" The Rajah's voice had an instantaneous, sobering effect. "Am I so craven that you must need behave like a demented creature in my presence? Cover thy head, O Shameless One! Speak before I force the words from your white-livered lips!"

The gestures of the dhai ceased, but her words came out hysterically.

"Her Highness . . . the Rani! O Bapri Bap! . . . Her Highness is possessed of another devil! And . . . and . . . is talking nothing but the devil's language!"

The Rajah received this communication in silence. Only by a slightly lowered head did he momentarily give indication of his grief and shock. Then, as though his tongue were tied, he shot an imploring look at Garfield.

"Now do you believe?" asked Garfield impressively. "Or do you want another sign?"

The Rajah bowed his head, and, throwing his right hand almost to the ground as he bent low to make obeisance, he lifted it to his forehead and, with head still bowed, said in a firm, proud voice, but one which betrayed his agony of mind:

"I believe."

"Her Highness, the Rani, has need of me. I go to serve you and her. Lead the way."

Following the Rajah up the great central staircase Garfield passed through the purdahed room where, twelve hours before, he had interviewed the Rani.

The Rajah with his own hand raised the chick, and Garfield entered as a stranger the Zenana of the Rajah of Kohajulia, the first man to violate its sanctity since the House was founded.

Following the Rajah down the dimly lighted corridor he saw flitting shadows disappearing into archways that opened on to the passage and, in spite of an effort to control his emotions, he had a nervous, apprehensive feeling. He found his hands trembling, not with fright but with anxiety; but he never wavered in his determination; there was a life to save, and he would save it at all costs.

The loud murmurings of a raving woman added to the eeriness of the atmosphere, and wail upon wail cut through the air with terrifying monotony.

As though deaf to all sounds the Rajah continued his advance. Like a king he maintained a

kingly dignity as he halted at the side of an arched doorway, and majestically motioned his companion to enter.

The sight which met Garfield's eyes boiled his blood ; the room was crowded with women moaning and gesticulating, and from the lips of the woman on the bed shrieked forth loud, delirious, unintelligible words.

The atmosphere of the room smelt of human beings. It was suffocating and foetid, and the solitary, smoking, cocoanut oil chirag* in a nich in the wall gave the room a sepulchral appearance.

He turned to the Rajah, so indignant that for the moment he partially forgot his rôle, and the words which followed lost their full effect.

"The Messenger of Kali will not cast out the evil eye in the presence of so many women."

There was a pause. The Rajah was scanning his face with a dubious expression.

Under the stress of his indignation Garfield had dropped the sari from his mouth, and a grave suspicion had entered the Rajah's mind.

Now he came to think of it, the ayah seemed to him rather tall for a woman, and it struck him that her gait as she had entered the room was noticeably agile.

The telepathy which often passes between people on occasions such as these, came to Garfield's aid. He was aware that the suspicion in the Rajah's look was less pronounced than in his mind and, if the Rajah were given many more

* Indian Lamp

moments of free thought, the veil which he was trying to penetrate would disappear.

Garfield now regretted he had not told his Assistant Surgeon (the Doctor Babu) that he was visiting the Raj-Koti; he felt that by that omission he had burnt his boats behind him. But those personal thoughts he thrust from him. The dominating thought was his patient's welfare.

Detection must come, that was inevitable; it was only a matter of time. Time, however, was against him, and with that reflection, for the first time since he had entered the Palace, the thought of failure crossed his mind.

If he were discovered before he had administered the anti-toxine all his efforts and play acting would be wasted, his object defeated. If he were found out, although there was no telling what action the Rajah would immediately take, it was certain that he would not be left for long with his patient; the subsequent consequences were, for the time being, a matter of no importance.

He was a zealot, with the fire of professional zeal urging him on, and he determined that the Rajah's thoughts must be diverted at all costs!

"Out with these women!" His voice was steady and commanding.

"Out with these women?" The Rajah repeated the sentence questioningly. "Why, they are members of my Household, and some of them the Rani's serving maids."

"And the devil which I am about to cast out

may enter into one of them. Is this your wish ? For the devil is a female devil ! ”

“ Women of my Household, leave the room. ”

Two serving maids attempted to follow the rest but the Rajah had no consideration for them. The appalling thought struck him that if the devil did not enter into someone it might remain in the Rani, and his superstitious instincts were aroused.

In a voice of thunder which sent the quaking serving women almost out of their mind, he ordered them to remain.

“ Bring me that chirag ! ”

One of the trembling serving women handed it to Garfield who, in turn, gave it to the Rajah, and as the latter took it the Doctor felt, more than saw, the scrutinising eyes on his face.

Slowly and deliberately he snuffed the charred wick and, as he did so, the Rajah recognised his face ; that is, he recognised it as the face of someone he had met before, but he could not quite remember when or where.

“ Hold that light here, ” said Garfield, suddenly raising the Rani into a sitting position while, with his free hand, he opened her mouth and depressed her tongue with a spatula. It *was* diphtheria.

But that tell-tale spatula was enough for the Rajah. As it flashed in the light of the lamp he located his man, and in the shock the chirag dropped from his hand, leaving the room in total darkness.

The darkness did not, however, worry Garfield ;

he could accomplish what he had to do with his eyes blindfolded.

Intent on his work, and as calm and cool as if he were in an operating theatre, the fall of the purdah as the Rajah disappeared, although he heard it, did not disconcert him.

Quite unperturbed and as methodically as though time were no object, he lowered his delirious patient to a recumbent position.

The precious moments were flying quickly ; any hitch, and all his efforts to save the Rani's life would be thrown away. But there was no hurry on Garfield's part.

Quietly but firmly he gripped the flesh of the Rani's arm, rubbed on the skin between his fingers the iodine he had brought with him. The next moment the needle of the hypodermic syringe had penetrated the flesh.

The scream which followed had a terror-stricken ring ; the struggles of the woman were almost superhuman, but her flesh was held in a grip which allowed her arm no movement. The plunger of the syringe started on its downward journey.

There were sounds of sandalled feet in the passage outside. Unperturbed, though with a mind keenly alert, he kept a steady even pressure on the plunger ; he felt it giving slowly under the action of his thumb, but the fleeting seconds seemed interminable. Would the plunger *never* get home ?

The footsteps halted at the entrance ; still

Garfield retained his professional touch. . . . The relief of it—the plunger yielded no more ! A strong injection of anti-toxine, fifteen thousand units, was there to do its work.

Withdrawing the needle with even more care than usual, for in spite of his detection he had no wish to leave its tell-tale end behind, a smile broke up the severity of the Doctor's keen, ascetic face—he held the instrument free and safe in his hands.

It was then that he felt the first sign of any re-action, but once more his strong will came to his aid. Realising he had no time to unscrew the needle he broke it off, threaded it through his sari and, lifting the purdah, met the Rajah on the point of entering.

They exchanged no words. As though both men understood the thoughts of the other, Garfield followed the Rajah down the corridor, and once more the two met face to face in the purdahed room, only this time they met behind closed doors.

CHAPTER XV

“ So Major Garfield has so little respect for our religious beliefs that he stops at nothing to force his way into my Zenana ? It is very English of you, Major Garfield, and I appreciate the subtlety of your insult in coming in the guise of a low caste ayah ! It will be a splendid joke to tell in the club, huh ? ”

The words, quietly but quickly spoken were hissed with an irony and hate that was unmistakable. The Rajah's face expressed even more than his words. His teeth, gleaming white between his parted, snarling lips, were plainly visible in the ill-lighted room, and with eyes afire, betokening suppressed but savage cruelty, he looked the very incarnation of a devil, and Garfield found himself at a loss for an answer.

What answer was there to give ? The Rajah was in no mood to listen to rational explanations, let alone irrational ones, and Garfield now realised the folly of the step he had taken.

He had committed the unpardonable sin, in the eyes of a native, of looking upon the face of the Rajah's favourite wife and, in consequence,

she was already an outcast, a woman with whom a man in the Rajah's position could not consort. And in the face of these reflections he saw the futility, the foolishness even, of going into a long rigmarole of how and why he had done it, because, in the circumstances, the Rajah would not be prepared to give credence to the tale.

Until he had snapped the needle from the barrel of the syringe he had been blind to every thought other than that of saving a life and he realised, as he stood there facing the Rajah, that he was as much a fanatic as the man himself.

But though he did not answer he did not flinch. He knew the Rajah had him in his power and could do with him practically what he liked—short of murdering him. No one would believe the tale he had to tell; the Rajah's story would carry weight if it ever came to tale-telling.

He knew that, by his own acts, he had practically lost the protection of the law. What Court would believe he had entered the Zenana in the guise of a native woman for purely professional reasons?

He could imagine his foolish appearance if he dared to prosecute for any injury he might suffer. Those in authority, no matter how they might sympathise, would refuse him support when they were told he had violated the sanctity of the Zenana—a sanctity which the British Raj did all in its power to uphold.

As for telling the tale in the club!—He could see the lips of even his friends curl in disbelief

at a married man who had exhibited such an absence of ordinary discretion. The saying: "There's never smoke without fire" enunciated the principle on which he would be judged.

"You have nothing to say, Major Garfield, huh?"

The Rajah spoke the words quietly, inoffensively, and the look which accompanied them was especially calculated to deceive. He too had been busy with his thoughts. He had Garfield in his power and he wanted to lull his suspicions with honeyed words. There should be no anger in Garfield's mind to temper the blow which was about to fall.

"I must ask you, Major Garfield, to follow me. Although no one on this side of the Palace knows English, you have a saying that even the walls have ears, and what we have to say to one another must be between ourselves."

Without waiting for any reply the Rajah turned and tapped on the heavy teakwood door. The bolts were shot back and the door was opened.

The Rajah walked along the whole length of the balcony, and Garfield, looking down into the hall, noticed that the doors of the main entrance were closed and an armed guard stood on each side.

After traversing a couple of long passages the Rajah arrived at the top of a stone staircase which led down to a dimly lighted underground passage, and, beckoning Garfield to follow, he descended the long flight of steps.

Arriving at the bottom he turned to the right along a short passage, apparently hewn out of solid rock, and inserted a key in a low doorway at the further end.

An eerie, creepy feeling came over Garfield as he stood motionless while the Rajah unlocked the door. He was well aware that if he showed any disinclination to obey, the Rajah would summon assistance and by force compel him to do what he was now doing with some semblance of dignity.

The sudden change in the Rajah's manner puzzled Garfield. He now felt he would be given no chance to explain; and the Rajah's next words puzzled him more. They were such a complete answer to the thoughts passing through his mind.

"I think, Major Garfield, it is too late for explanations to-night. I regret that I cannot give you a room in the private apartments of the Palace. You could not very well remain in the Zenana, and my Household might misjudge if you slept on my side of the house."

There was a mocking note in the Rajah's voice as he finished speaking.

Pushing open the door, he signalled Garfield to precede him.

"The room is dark, and somewhat small, but for the short time you will be in it perhaps you will put up with such minor inconveniences."

Garfield had a shrewd suspicion that once he entered that room the door would close on him

and he would be imprisoned there for several days at least. Further than that his mind could not penetrate the Rajah's intentions, but he had no doubt that some other punishment was in store for him in addition to a short period of confinement.

He hesitated before entering. He had no wish to be caught in a trap. So he stood motionless, wanting to say many things but stayed his tongue, because he felt that the less he said the better.

The Rajah seemed to understand the meaning of his silence and hesitation for he stepped inside the room as an encouragement to Garfield to follow.

From the very first Garfield had banished all thought of escape. He knew well enough there could be no escape from the Palace that night. But his mind was keenly alert and, acting under the influence of some mental spur, he suddenly determined to hold the Rajah as a hostage for his safety.

He gave him a sudden push and banged the door. The click of the lock as the bolt shot home reverberated in a manner which suggested that the room they were in was nothing but a vault. The next moment Garfield was leaning with his back against the closed door.

An ironical laugh from the Rajah told Garfield how unexpected the manœuvre had been, but if the latter's intuition had in any way been deficient the next remark of the Rajah would have left him in no doubt.

“ You seem to know as much about my Palace as I do, Major Garfield. One would think you were aware that the door cannot be opened from this side. You have not a match by any chance ? ”

Garfield was astounded at the complete change of tone in the Rajah's voice. His words and the expression he gave to them were reminiscent of the conversation they had had the previous morning—as the Rajah intended they should be.

“ I'm afraid I haven't. I didn't come prepared to—er—have a smoke with you ! ”

The Rajah chuckled softly. “ I see, Major Garfield, you are by way of being a philosopher also ! And now that we are locked up here for the night I may as well tell you what my intentions are—It will be a test for your philosophy !—The room we are in corresponds with the dungeon of an English castle, but we treat our prisoners with a little more consideration than your forefathers treated theirs in the Middle Ages. The difference in our methods is that in Europe they tortured their prisoners in the those times, and because they had it on their conscience they gave up the torture as civilization advanced.”

Garfield smiled.

“ In this Palace we have never resorted to anything so inhuman. We let our prisoners torture themselves and, as our methods do not strain our conscience, we have no reason to change them.

“ Once anyone is placed in this room we forget

all about them. It is not that we wish to be unkind, but our memories are very short, if I may put it that way."

"Put it any way you like," muttered Garfield.

"We do, however, look after their wants to some extent. In the absence of a light, I suggest you grope in that corner on the right of the door. There you will find a brass vessel which contains water, and in a niche above the vessel there are fourteen chowpatties *—quite sufficient to keep a man alive for fourteen days. The lock of the door is so contrived that after the lapse of a fortnight the mechanism unlocks it,—we invented this contrivance because of our short memories—and anyone who survives the period is deemed to have expiated his offence, no matter what it be, and is free to depart."

While the Rajah was speaking Garfield paced the length and breadth of the room and, as far as the darkness permitted, examined the fit of the door.

"I think I understand you, Rajah. What you mean to say is that the lock is so contrived that the door does not open until your prisoner is dead. I gather there are no windows of any kind and that the door is practically air-tight, so the chances are that a prisoner would suffocate in this small room long before his fourteen days were up."

"Oh, there you are wrong! There is a tunnel from this room which leads out into the open air. Although it is big enough for a man to pass

* Thin flat cakes made of flour and water.

through, it is not intended for that purpose. You see, it opens on to a large masonry tank with very high vertical sides, plastered smooth, and the depth of the water is quite sufficient to drown any ordinary man.

"As an additional precaution against escape we have several tenants in the tank. One of them has been there for close on two hundred years. They are crocodiles of sorts, and some of them have most voracious appetites. Again, owing to our short memories, we sometimes forget to feed the creatures."

"Yes, you would!" was Garfield's unexpressed thought.

"At one time the tunnel descended almost to the water's edge, and my great-grandfather, who was the ruling Rajah at the time, had imprisoned a woman in this room for the offence of adultery.

"On the fourteenth day after her incarceration he, according to custom, proceeded to this room to escort her out of the Palace, only to find that she had suffered a most untimely end. A crocodile had taken her place and, being a very greedy fellow, he seized the opportunity to make a meal of my great-grandfather. Afterwards the mouth of the tunnel was raised. I think it gives better ventilation than the old one—at any rate, I am told it does."

CHAPTER XVI

At first it appeared to Garfield an incredible thing that the Rajah really intended to imprison an official of his standing for so long a period as fourteen days. If the Rajah were to have him flogged and then set him free it could be done with very little risk, and he would have to grin and bear it ; but long before the fourteen days were up there would be a hue and cry all over the Province to trace his whereabouts.

The Rajah and his officials would, in time, be closely questioned, and in time, undoubtedly, a warrant to search the Palace would be issued. The only thing he had to reckon with was the cunning of the Rajah, for in spite of the raillery of his conversation Garfield read a sinister determination into his words.

That determination was a force with which he would have to reckon. A man who could get rid of an enemy like Gokul Rao, was not likely to be baulked of his revenge against a man who had outraged his Zenana. And the horrible thought fastened on his mind that as soon as the Rajah apprehended any danger he would engage paid

hirelings to hammer him to death and throw his body into the tank.

Then he began to wonder why the Rajah was talking so complacently. Was it additional evidence of the subtle cunning of the man? Did he, in the hope of avoiding any design against his person, want to lull suspicion until his servants came to set him free?

He was debating these points when the Rajah's words suddenly cut into his thoughts, words which seemed to suggest that the Rajah was reading every thought passing through his mind.

"I suppose, Major Garfield, in a day or two the police will be searching all over the Province, and you are apprehensive that it may precipitate some violence to your person. But I can assure you that nothing of the kind will happen. You will be left unmolested for fourteen days, and on the fourteenth day, if you are still alive, the door will open and you will find me outside, waiting to escort you out of the Palace. I am not telling you this to lull your suspicions because you hold me, as you think, for the time being a hostage. There will be no question of holding me as a hostage when the morning comes.

"Any effort you might make to detain me would be doomed to failure. Your only chance of getting evens with me is to overpower me now, when of course it would be a struggle between us to throttle one another.

"I put it that way because nothing less would

suffice and then, if you succeeded, you would have to stand your trial for murder.

"You can see the position you would be in. You force your way into my Zenana dressed as a ayah, and I think you would have to admit that you came here of your own accord, and desecrated my Zenana. You know what we Indians and your authorities think of that !

"Therefore, I am entitled to detain you and send for the police, and if it should leak out that you murdered me rather than be detained that would be the end of Major Garfield ! I can assure you that I no more fear death than you do. I am quite unarmed, so if you wish for a struggle now is your time. In the morning it will be too late ; but, late or early, I would ask you to entertain no very great hope of escaping your punishment."

"I am well aware that for the moment the cards are against me, but——"

"I know what you are going to say. You are going to point out the risk I run in detaining you. You see I read the thoughts which pass through your mind, huh ? Those risks, Major Garfield, I am prepared to take and meet them as they arise."

The heat of the room was now beginning to tell ; Garfield felt thirsty. The active working of his mind, the uncertainty of the future, the strain of what he had been through, had made him freely perspire, and with the knowledge of the finality of his ordeal came the knowledge of his thirst.

Groping in the corner his hand touched a brass vessel. He dipped his finger in it. The Rajah had spoken the truth ; it was full of water and his fingers told him that the size of the vessel provided a liberal supply, sufficient to last with care for fourteen days.

Suppressing a sigh of relief he spoke :

"I'll have a drink if the water's all right."

"I can see the doctor in you even in your strange surroundings ! I suppose you are wondering whether the water contains any of those mythical animalculæ which you doctors call germs, huh ? "

"I was just wondering."

The Rajah chuckled. "I think I can give you an assurance on that point. The water comes from our own well. You will find a brass tumbler beside the vessel."

Garfield groped again and, dipping the tumbler into the water, raised it to his lips.

The water was *salty* ! The full significance of it struck him like a blow. He no longer doubted the Rajah's intention, and the fiendishness of that intention stirred his anger.

"My God ! What a scoundrel you are ! I understand your devilish schemes now ! "

Garfield thought of the fool he had been to imagine that anyone could ever have left that room alive. Long before the fourteen days were up any poor wretches would be driven by maddening thirst to drink the water. The salt in it would turn any man's brain, converting him into

a desperate maniac, unheedful of any consequences. No wonder the poor devils cut short their lives by plunging into the tank! He could see it all now, and what was more, he knew his own fate. His impulse was to turn and rend the man who could consign him to such a horrible death; but the Rajah's quiet voice somewhat steadied him.

"You do not like the water, huh?"

With clenched fists Garfield advanced in the Rajah's direction, his fingers itching to bury themselves in the cynical scoundrel's throat, when suddenly he suffered another shock.

"So Major Garfield has decided to commit murder?"

The word "murder" and the peculiar intonation with which it was uttered steadied him again, and the Rajah knew the danger was past. Garfield felt some hidden power holding him in check.

"You see, Major Garfield, I am not afraid, and you are no coward, but a brave man. There are, however, occult powers associated with this room and known to me, which, unless my time has come, place you at a great disadvantage. You see, when my great-grandfather lost his life we consecrated this chamber to the Goddess Kali, and the Deity who accepted the blood sacrifice would surely grant the Head of our House immunity from harm in what is now Her Temple.

"You can see now the truth of my previous remark when I told you that our prisoners torture

themselves. But you must not consider me an arch-fiend—it is you who have brought all this on yourself. There is something holy in the thought that even the wife of an Indian Rajah should be allowed to live and die in her faith. The suffering that you have caused to me and the Rani, your innocent victims, could not be told in words. In the eyes of my people the child she bears, even if you have been successful in casting out the evil eye, will be illegitimate. Do you know what that means? That he will as surely die as you will. And does not our religion call for an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth? My wife is no longer my wife, she is an outcast who can never regain her caste, and she must be a menial in the House where she has been a Queen.”

There was a huskiness in the Rajah's voice as he spoke.

“As for me, my sufferings are nothing. I deserve what I have brought on my head, but my concern for the Rani is not tempered by the thought that it is I who, by seeking your aid, have been instrumental in raising the barrier between us.

“Against the wishes of my High Priest I sought your aid, and the man I trusted has stabbed my heart. If I had done what you have done, Major Garfield, I would not desire to murder the man whose confidence and trust I had betrayed.”

No other words could have re-established the bond of sympathy between these men. For,

though Garfield remained silent, the Rajah knew the thoughts passing through his mind. Atonement was in the air. And Garfield's sense of balance returned.

He felt he must now speak quietly and convincingly. It was not so much religion which stood in the way of a reconciliation as the Rajah's wounded heart. It was not his pride, it was not his beliefs. He had lost what counts with everyone—the society of the woman who held his love. And with these reflections Garfield realised what the sanctity of the Zenana meant.

“I have a proposition to make, Rajah. Little more than two hours ago you welcomed me as a God-sent messenger and, although I am an Englishman, cannot your Goddess make me the instrument through which She acts? Is Her power so limited that She can only transmit it through your own race? Or is the power of the Deity common to all religions? And is not the manner in which we worship the outcome of our upbringing and education? Is there nothing coincidental in my visit this morning? Before you pass judgment on it let me ask you to trust my knowledge for once. I can assure you that if I had not taken steps to force my way into the Zenana your wife would never have recovered. There is some knowledge which you possess that I do not question; my knowledge in this matter is one that cannot be controverted.

“One look at the Rani's throat confirmed my worse suspicions. She has diphtheria, and diph-

theria complicated by a virulent attack of malaria can only end one way. There is only one cure for diphtheria—anti-toxine. I have already given her an injection of it and, as she is only in the early stages of the disease, I can promise you that she will recover. Not one case in a hundred fails to respond to the treatment if it be given in the early stages, and, when this complication is out of the way, I can guarantee to cure her malaria if you put her unreservedly in my hands. You have discovered my disguise—has anyone else ? ”

“ No, Major,” the absence of the word “ Garfield ” was not lost on the Doctor, “ no one.”

“ Then why give it away ? Why let anyone in your Palace know that the sanctity of your Zenana has been violated ? Why shouldn't the secret be one between you and me ? With your connivance nobody need know that I am any other than the Messenger of Kali, sent to you in the humble garb of an ayah. I will give your Rani back to you, and I will give you her child. But for my intervention you would have lost both and in this case, Rajah, it is not so much your religion that is preying on your mind and stirring your enmity against me as the thought that I have come between you and your Rani's love. Would you have been more satisfied if it had been fate ? ”

The Rajah reflected a moment. He recognized the truth of Garfield's deduction.

“ And you promise me that she will recover ? ”

“ Yes.”

"And if she does not?"

"Then, Rajah, I give you my word that if you ask me to end my days in this dungeon I will accept your decision."

"And you do this, Major——?"

"Because I stop at nothing to save a life. Do you think I didn't know the risks I ran when I came to you in this make-up? And do you think I didn't know that you had penetrated my disguise when you dropped the chirag? And the likely consequences? If I had thought of myself first and the Rani afterwards I might have made good my escape. But I stayed and took the risk because, perhaps, I am somewhat fanatical when there is a life to save, and doubly so when there are two. It is my cursed nature, I cannot help it."

"Well, Major, I think you know something of my character. I accept an Englishman's word; it is one thing we have learnt to respect, and you offer me a very heavy bribe. You offer me the life of the Rani and the child she carries in return for your life. I will accept it, but I have a few conditions to make. You will remain in this place until the Rani is cured. You can only see her at night, for it would never do if your disguise were discovered. And if the Rani dies, well, Major . . . I shall not come to unlock the door. . . . Is it a bargain?"

"I agree, Rajah."

"Then we will leave it at that. In the morning when the Diwan comes to release me—for no one but the Diwan is allowed to descend the steps

leading to this chamber, and no one but the Diwan and myself hold the key of the door—I will inform him that we came to pray in this dungeon consecrated to Kali, because the Messenger of Kali is here to intercede with the Deity for the life of my Rani and my heir.”

CHAPTER XVII

THREE nights later Garfield was pacing his prison, impatient and agitated of mind. Punctually at the hour of ten the Rajah had come every night to conduct him to the Zenana, but the Palace clock had long since struck ten and there was no sign of his appearance.

On the previous night the Rani had shown symptoms of a relapse and he had given her a stronger injection of quinine than usual. Had something happened? Had he failed after all? Had he been too drastic with the quinine, considering the patient's condition? Was the quinine which the Rajah had procured reliable?

The minutes dragged. An hour passed . . . Eleven! Still no signs of footsteps.

The heat of the prison had told on his strength. The want of exercise had made him restive. The want of food had weakened him. Would the Rajah *never* come? He must have failed after all! Perhaps that dhai had surreptitiously given the Rani a potion of her own concoction? They were always doing these things! The thought appalled him. Such a thing would be fatal. The

agonising thought that the Rani had succumbed became more concrete.

It was, however, no longer the Rani's welfare which was uppermost in his mind. The instinct of self-preservation was uppermost. There he was, helplessly caged. Was he to be left like a rat to die in that hole? The uncertainty was unbearable. His mind was working with the fury of a maniac. What was he to do? How still the place was! Would he never see Vivienne again? Was she to be the innocent victim of *his* folly?

He had long since drained the last drop of fresh water which had been provided, and now his thirst was maddening. Could he survive the long confinement in such surroundings? With that thought the folly of pacing his prison struck him. He was wasting his strength, overheating himself unnecessarily, adding to his thirst.

He should be lying flat on the floor. His only chance was to lie still with the minimum of movement. But thirteen days of it! What an effort of will it would entail. The thought had an instantaneously sobering effect. Of course, he couldn't survive thirteen days. No man could in the heat of that confined space without water. But life was dear. It might be possible, and there was the chance that the Rajah might relent, the chance that the authorities would come to his rescue. Remote chances, but chances all the same. Every extra minute he could live added to those chances.

He lay prone on the floor. He had begun the tussle between will and time. Twelve struck. Oh God! How he would lie there hour after hour, waiting for the ringing out of the intervals of time!

How many hours would he have to remain motionless? Thirteen times twenty-four are. . . No, he couldn't do it that way. Two hundred and forty in ten days . . . two hundred and sixty-four in eleven days, two hundred and eighty-eight in . . .

What was that sound? Foot steps? Yes, footsteps! And the noise of a key in the lock.

A wave of cool air swept over him as the door opened. Garfield jumped to his feet with alacrity.

"Asleep, Major? You surprise me! I could not have fallen asleep on the eve of my release."

"I wasn't asleep—I was only lying down."

"Well, Major, I have come to tell you that you are at liberty to depart. But I have also come to apologise for the inconvenience and hardships you have suffered. Believe me, they were not the result of a desire to inflict pain. Everyone in the Palace believes that it is the Goddess herself who has visited us in the garb of an ayah, and to supply you with food and drink sufficient for a mortal would have made it more difficult for me to carry out the deception.

"Major, I beg to thank you for what you have done, and I want to express my gratitude for the

way you have behaved. It has helped me considerably to hide your identity."

"You needn't thank me for that. I did it for my own sake as much as yours."

"Well, Major, that may be, but you took risks when you came, in the guise of an ayah, to save two lives which are very valuable to me. For the Rani has just been safely delivered of her child, and God has given me an heir. Major, I offer you my hand. If I were a free agent I would change my opinion about your profession. I would like to let my compeers know of the cure you have effected. It might do something to obtain a relaxation of our caste rules. Unfortunately I could not do this without letting them know that I had been a pioneer in admitting a man to my Zenana, and I think you know that in matters of this kind it is the pioneer who suffers. I have no wish, Major, to be the catspaw to take such a monkey-nut out of the hearthstone, as your saying goes. Will you give me your hand?"

Garfield felt he could not take the Rajah's hand. There rose before him a vision of emaciated wretches, demented with their torture, crying out in agony for water. The recollection of his own torture was too fresh to be brushed aside.

"No, Rajah, I can't take the hand of a man who will stop at nothing, not even murder, to uphold the trivialities of a ridiculous caste rule!"

"I am sorry, Major, that you despise me so much, and more sorry that at a time like this,

when I am overcome with gratitude, you should deem it fitting to throw my religious scruples in my face.

"You do not realise that, for the sake of a human life, I have thrown aside the traditions of centuries, and prostituted faith and creed.

"I will never offer you my hand again. I have said before, 'One half of the world does not know how the other half lives,' and perhaps you have taken the hand of a murderer before to-day. You do not take mine simply because I have broken the eleventh commandment. Let that be, but even your Government makes allowances for our upbringing, our religion and our creed. And even in your own country your law admits the right of a person to defend his life. It is not murder to shoot in self-defence. Is my Rani's honour less to me than my life?"

The Rajah's words vibrated some hidden chord of sympathy in Garfield for the man who pleaded for his tolerance. But in that dungeon, with its memory of anguish, Garfield could not bring himself to relent and he waited for the Rajah to continue.

"Major, I ask you to remember my words. I want to tell you that, just as it was written in my horoscope that you should serve me, so it is also written that I shall serve you. There is no request in reason which you could make which I would not grant. Henceforth, Major, your honour is *my honour*, and I will protect you and yours as I would protect my own."

For a few minutes the two men stood in that dark dungeon, each waiting for the other to speak. At last the Rajah broke the silence.

"It is now past midnight, Major, and I propose to accompany you as far as the Holy stones, about a mile from here on the Ghurumpur road, which have been dedicated to Kali. There, beneath the pepal tree, and on ground sacred to the Goddess, I will take my leave of you.

"By the side of the pepal tree there is an empty hut to accommodate the Holy men who, when passing, desire to pray. In the hut you will find a change of clothes and, at the milestone a little further on, a tonga is waiting for you. Leave your ayah's clothes in the hut, Major. They will be discovered in the morning and the news conveyed to me. I shall then inform my household that the Messenger of Kali has left the earth and thrown off for ever the humble garb which she assumed.

"To-morrow, at the time of the setting of the sun, my High Priest shall burn the clothes on a pyre before the Holy stones, and later I shall build a temple on the site, and consecrate it to the Messenger of Kali."

CHAPTER XVIII

It was close on three o'clock in the morning when Garfield entered the Sinclair's compound and, to avoid disturbing the household, walked cautiously along the drive.

It was a glorious Eastern night ; the clouds had vanished, as they sometimes do in the rains a few hours before dawn, leaving the moon in almost unchallenged possession of the blue-grey sky ; only the stars of first magnitude disputed her possession, and they seemed to be winking apologies for their unnecessary presence.

The stillness of the air, the Eastern brilliance of the moonlight, the dark shadows cast by the trees, the scintillating dew-covered leaves of the tropical shrubs, the glistening spider webs on the spangled grass, the suspicion of a cold weather nip in the air, were all so entrancing that for a moment or two Garfield stood still and allowed his eyes to feast on the scene.

The tinkling tonga bell, jingling in the distance, seemed to be ringing a love song for his ears. He was a free agent once more ! In another minute or so he would be holding his wife in his arms.

The thought stirred him and, continuing his walk, he crossed the verandah and with quiet footsteps entered his wife's room.

His approach, though almost noiseless, awakened the punkah walli * to a sense of her duty, and as he stood just inside the door, he heard the swishing of the punkah frills and, what he thought was, the quiet regular breathing of his wife.

The sound puzzled him, for it did not seem to come from the mosquito-net-covered bed. Straining his ears, he caught the faint and irregular breathing of another person, and his practised ear told him that the breather had a temperature and was not entirely free from pain.

His eyes had now become accustomed to the darkness and, peering round the room, he caught sight of a shrouded figure lying at the foot of the bed. The sight alarmed him and, tiptoeing across the bedroom, he pushed open the bathroom door.

The light of the hurricane lantern, standing on the top of the masonry curb which encompassed the bath tub, seemed to disturb the sleepers. The shrouded figure turned over, and from the bed came the sound of a subdued voice.

"Ayah! What's the matter?" The voice was too low to disturb the woman's heavy sleep, and it sent a shiver of apprehension through Garfield.

"Vivienne, what's wrong?"

"Hugh! Oh, you've come back." There was no ring of welcome in her words.

* A woman who pulls the punkah

In a moment he had roused and dismissed the ayah. Then, lifting the mosquito net and sitting on the bed, he bent and kissed her, but her lips were unresponsive.

"What's the matter, Vi?" He slipped his arm under her shoulders. She shuddered, and Garfield felt as though cold water had been poured into his heart.

"Oh, don't bother me! I've not been well, that's all."

He felt her pulse and came to the conclusion she was really more tired than ill. Then, after asking a few leading questions he persuaded her to speak, and heard the tale she had to tell. It accounted for her mood. It accounted for her tiredness. She was fretting over their loss.

"Never mind, little woman, you'll be all right in a day or two, if you take it quietly and stay in bed."

"I *don't* mind!—I'm glad, oh, I'm *glad*!"

"Vivienne!" At the moment that was all he could trust himself to say. At first he thought her words were only the outcome of the petulance of a sick and tired woman but, as he dwelt on their meaning and her manner of saying them, he dismissed that idea.

If there was one thing about his wife's character of which he had been absolutely certain, it was that her love of children was a genuine love, but the note of relief in her voice as she uttered those ominous words was so sincere that he wondered if even in this he could be mistaken.

She spoke like a woman unexpectedly released from something which had been preying on her mind ; and not only her words but the look she gave him as she uttered them, reflected a genuine relief. It appeared to him as though she were giving vent to pent up emotions, and because he could not fathom them, and thinking it would ease her mind to confide in him, he said : " Glad ! Tell me why ? " but in spite of an effort he could not restrain a tone of reproach from creeping into his voice.

" Because I don't want a child. I should go mad if I had one ! "

Hugh stared at her in amazement. Was every conception which he had formed of this woman false ? Was she only a fair weather bird, one who could not battle with circumstances ? He gave a sigh at the thought that every effort of his to reconcile her to an Indian life had failed. The history of their association, ever since they had arrived in Ghurumpur, was a history of misunderstanding. She seemed to saddle him with the responsibility for her failure to fight her own battles. . . . " Everything was his fault for bringing her to such a God-forsaken country ! " . . . She had on one occasion used those actual words. And now she was glad—glad they had lost their child !

" Glad, Vi ! Do you know what you're saying ? "

" Yes, and I mean it ! If you want to know, I'm sorry I ever married you ! But leave me

alone, I think it's time I asked you questions. I'd like to know where *you've* been ! ”

Hugh did not know that Oldham was the father of the thought which was responsible for the underlying suspicion in her words, and also for the fall that had brought on her illness. They were dancing together and, a propos her husband's sudden departure (for Kohajulia) he had whispered in her ear : “ He's a wise man who knows what a doctor's up to ! And women exercise their charm the world over, whether they're white or black ! ”

It was those words which had momentarily arrested her steps and the irresponsible Cosgrave, in a wild rush down the room with his partner, had collided with her and the sudden impact had thrown her to the floor.

Had Vivienne asked her question without that strain of hateful suspicion, Hugh might have been tempted to give her an explanation which, without actually breaking his promise to the Rajah, would have satisfied any ordinary wife, but the ring of suspicion was too hurtful and too insinuating for him to respond.

“ Why do you ask that question in that way ? ”

“ Because I want to know ! ”

It was his first intention to take up the challenge but a wave of compassion stayed him. Perhaps he had misjudged her ; perhaps his mental reproaches were undeserved. Perhaps she had something on her mind which she would

not disclose, and, at any rate, she was tired and overwrought and not herself.

"Why worry about this now, darling? It's rest you want," he said, hoping to calm her petulance.

"And that's all the answer I'm to get?"

"Vi darling, don't talk like that," said Hugh soothingly. "It is not that I don't want to tell you; it's only that I don't know how, for I've given a promise to someone to say nothing about it. I see now it wasn't quite fair to you, but I never thought you'd suspect me like this. I'm wondering how I can let you know without actually breaking my word. That's all."

"You've promised so say nothing about it? What wife wouldn't suspect!"

"Vivienne, you're making a mountain out of a molehill!"

"Oh no, I'm not! I can see you're not going to tell me—not the truth at any rate. It's a professional secret I suppose! A woman who married a doctor is a fool!"

"Vi!"

"Oh, I know it. I was warned about it before I married you. If it were all above-board you wouldn't put me off like this. I'm not exactly a child, Hugh, I understand! A man doesn't go away for four days for nothing, does he?"

"I'm not saying it's nothing."

"Well, will you tell me where you've been?"

"I can't, Vi, not in so many words, but——"

"So I'm still to be treated as a child?"

At that retort the last ounce of patience which he possessed melted away.

"Yes, because you are a child, and a very petulant one! If you can't get what you want the minute you want it, you don't mind how you hurt my feelings."

"Well, if that's the way you mean to treat me, we'll leave it at that. But you mustn't be surprised at anything I do now!"

"I'm not. I'm quite prepared for anything! When you say you're glad we've——" He pulled himself up with an effort. He realised the futility of further conversation, and the danger, in her comparatively weak state, of further recrimination. And, feeling that he could not trust himself to restrain his anger and bitter disappointment if she made further insinuations, he put down the mosquito net and said:

"I'm going to sleep in the dressing room to-night."

"And every night after this, Hugh Garfield!" was her defiant retort as he closed the door.

CHAPTER XIX

THE Garfields had moved into their own bungalow. But the change, to which Vivienne had looked forward so much, only tended to make her life more difficult. She had not the faintest idea of household management; consequently her servants robbed her mercilessly.

At first she could see no fault in those she engaged, and, for a week or two after their arrival, praised everything they did.

It was only when they presented their bills at the end of the month—for every native servant has a monthly bill to present—that she had reason to be dissatisfied.

The bearer's bill for blacking, boot polish and other minor items, would have incensed the matron of a preparatory school, and the cook's bill positively appalled her.

It appalled Hugh:—"My dear girl," he said, "it's not the money I mind so much, as the insult to your intelligence. He must think you're easily taken in to present such a bill!"

Vivienne felt an unmerited sting in his words. Unaccustomed to censure, she flared up and gave

her husband another insight into her character.

"I've not been taken in—it's you! A married man has to pay twopence for a penny show! And I didn't come to you for a post-mortem on my management of the house. I want the money, that's all!"

Garfield sighed, and, unlocking his despatch box, handed her the amount without another word.

Her husband's words, however, had some effect. She remonstrated with the cook with the result that the latter got the better of the argument and the monthly bills showed no sign of decreasing.

For some weeks she was too proud to discuss the matter with anyone, but before long Garfield felt compelled, more for the sake of her domestic education than economy, to put her on an allowance, and then, pocketing her pride, she confided her troubles to Mrs. Sinclair.

That good lady's opinion coincided with Hugh's, and she told Vivienne bluntly that she was being systematically robbed.

"The only thing to do, Vivienne, is to have the cook in every morning, check his purchases, and, if the amount is too much, just pay him what you think is right and leave him to make the best of it."

Vivienne followed this advice, and the cook, realising that he had made as much as anyone in his position could have made in so short a time, decided that he had earned a holiday and promptly

left, but not before he had persuaded his brother to apply for the post under an assumed name.

His brother, Abdul Rahman, acted on the suggestion with alacrity, and, hiring a set of chits from the bazaar, was duly installed as cook in the Garfield's household, under the name of Abdul Hussain (lately deceased) and proceeded to carry on the good work of robbery without violence.

Abdul impressed Vivienne with his honesty from the beginning.

"I like Memsahib to see bazaar every day," he said, the first time he returned from making his purchases. "I bought Memsahib seven beautiful chickens"—holding out a bevy of live chickens, hanging by their feet from a cord he held in his hand.

Vivienne glanced at them and felt compassion for the poor birds.

"Yes! yes!" she said hurriedly. "Seven chickens at eight annas each—that's three rupees, eight annas. I've got that down. Eight annas for a chicken," she murmured to herself. "That's two annas cheaper than the last cook."

She did not know that three of those same chickens would be offered for her inspection on the morrow!

Abdul then bade the coolie who accompanied him to put the basket of meat and vegetables on the verandah, and proceeded to recount his purchases, item by item.

He soon discovered that the sight of raw goat, which he dubbed "first-class mutton, cutlet

brand," had an unnerving effect on his Mem-sahib, an effect which resulted in rather perfunctory checking. And thereafter "first class mutton" appeared as "item No. 1" on the daily list.

Until the end of the month, when the day came for Vivienne to total the amount of the daily purchases, things went swimmingly. The change of cooking was commented on by Hugh, who voted it a great improvement, but, when the day of reckoning arrived, to Vivienne's amazement there was little, if any, difference in the amount she was called upon to disburse.

She was almost in despair. She had not realised that, though everything was cheaper, the quantity was greater and that a certain portion of the vegetables and a goodly number of the eggs, etc., had appeared in the basket more than once. But the monthly bill convinced her that there was something wrong somewhere. It was therefore with the mental reservation that she would question Mrs. Sinclair about the daily quantities which should be purchased for their modest household, that she faced her husband with a request for a temporary addition to her allowance.

She had not the slightest idea of the number of chickens (she used the plural in her thoughts) which were necessary to make a dish of chicken cutlets for two; how many chickens, or how much mutton and vegetables were required for the soup, or how many eggs went to make a custard.

Later, when she questioned Mrs. Sinclair, she

felt the task of household management was rendered more difficult. That lady's reply, "that it depended on the size of the chickens, the number of the cutlets or the amount of the custard," was not calculated to provide a basis for sure argument with her cook.

It was in vain Mrs. Sinclair put leading questions. When asked whether they were curry or roasting chickens, Vivienne, utterly at a loss for an answer, replied that they were all sorts and all colours, and was astonished when her friend burst into a shriek of laughter.

"My dear Vivienne, I give you up! There's only one thing to do, as I've told you before—pay what you think right and leave the cook to make the best of it. If he goes, get another! They'll learn in time you're not going to be robbed."

Fortified by this reiterated advice, and thoroughly exasperated at the amount she was being called upon to pay, she lost no time in telling her cook what, on Mrs. Sinclair's advice, she proposed to do, only to be disconcerted by the indulgent smile of superiority which the cook immediately assumed.

"I no understand what Memsahib mean. Sinclair Memsahib no treat her cook like that."

"No," retorted Vivienne, "but her bills are reasonable and mine are not."

The superior smile became more condescending.

"Sinclair Memsahib no eat always English food. She like curry and other cheap Indian dishes

which Memsahib no like. Sinclair Memsahib cook very bad cook. He buy Memsahib third class meat and old vegetables. All cooks in Ghurumpur same like this. I only real first-class cook in Ghurumpur. Memsahib perhaps forgotten she read my chits ? I bring them again to-morrow, Memsahib, I no like being made thief of."

The next morning, with the mildest of meek airs and a look of injured innocence on his face, Abdul Rahman once more thrust into Mrs. Garfield's hand the chits of Abdul Hussain, the loan of which he had again temporarily obtained for a monetary consideration.

Vivienne felt compelled to peruse them, and as she did so, the cook lost his meek air, and, his bosom swelling with unmerited pride, he remarked :

"I not most conomical cook Memsahib ? Chits not tell I very cheap cook ?"

Vivienne had to admit that the chits bore testimony to his economy, and found herself apologising, in a mild sort of way, for her accusation. Then it was that Abdul Rahman played, what he thought, his trump card.

"Memsahib read one more chit. Me very proud this chit. It tell that I not only conomical cook, but fit for very big job."

He was sure that his Memsahib, on reading it, would see he was wasting his time in devoting his services to such a small household, and her realis-

ation of the fact would establish him, more firmly, in his position of trust.

Taking the chit out of the envelope she saw that it was written by her husband's predecessor, and ran as follows :

"The bearer, Abdul, has been my cook for some three months, and I strongly recommend anyone wanting a thoroughly reliable, economical cook to give him a wide berth."

She looked up at him in consternation. It was on the tip of her tongue to tell him the real meaning of the testimonial, but the recollection of her inflated bills stared her in the face and, with a cunning quite out of keeping with her normal self, she said calmly :

"Abdul, why didn't you show me this chit before ? "

"I thought Memsahib would say place too small for such first-class cook."

"That's exactly what I would have said, Abdul. It is too small, and you can go at the end of the month."

The departure of Abdul did not in any way lighten Vivienne's burden. It is given to only a few newcomers to the East to understand the Indian's mind, and to deal with servants on a proper basis from the start.

When they are understood and the methods of dealing with them are a mixture of the strictness and latitude allowed a child, no servants render better or more economical service.

That knowledge and understanding had yet to

come to Vivienne, and the home, to which at one time she had looked forward, became the habitat of irksome duties. She did not know the language, would not try to learn it, and consequently there were constant quarrels among the servants which she could not settle. And in time she came to hate her duties and to absent herself from the house as frequently as possible.

So by force of circumstances, the result of her own shortcomings, she sought diversion in more frequent and earlier visits to the club, read the English papers more eagerly and sighed for Home.

In time Frank Oldham became acquainted with her habits, and because he liked her company, he too began to visit the club more frequently ; and what were at first accidental meetings became preconcerted appointments.

Soon she began to make a practice of inviting him to dinner to take "pot luck," and Hugh acquiesced in it all. He had begun to like Oldham, as men often do when they have had an open quarrel. And Garfield had no doubt that that little trial of strength on the Chabutra had contributed to their mutual understanding.

CHAPTER XX

THE morning of the Rajah's annual shoot had arrived and Vivienne was cross and peevish.

Everything had gone wrong! Her horse had strained a tendon and in consequence her ride with Oldham was off. Mrs. Sinclair had written to say that two of her guests, who were expected from Balahabad, had telegraphed at the last minute to say they could not come, and suggested that Vivienne should join their party. She did not in the least like the suggestion, but Hugh was adamant and she had perforce to accept.

Shortly after breakfast, thoroughly agitated and disappointed, she was pacing the verandah, waiting impatiently to break the news to Oldham.

She had an idea in her head that if he would agree to leave his horse behind and accompany her husband she might persuade Hugh to take her place in the Sinclair's car on the return journey, and then Oldham could drive her back in their trap.

The noise of horse's hoofs striking the hard road caught her ear, and, turning quickly, she saw the man for whom she was waiting pass

through the entrance gate and canter down the drive. He looked to her the picture of healthy manhood as he reined in his horse under the porch and, throwing his right leg over the horse's neck, dropped to the ground.

"What the matter, Mrs. Garfield?" he hastened to say, surprised to see her without her riding habit. "Aren't you going to ride with me?"

There was just a suspicion of disappointment in his voice.

"No, my horse is lame, and the Sinclairs have asked me to join their party. Hugh wants you to go with him."

"I thought he was driving Mr. Sinclair?"

"Oh, that's all altered now. The Miss Goods have wired at the last minute to say they can't come."

"What a shock!" replied Oldham lightly, glad of the excuse to say something which hid the disappointment he felt. "I was looking forward to meeting the naughty Miss Good; I was rather keen on seeing whether she looked naughty!"

"And I," said Mrs. Garfield demurely, "was dying to see the good Miss Good; it would have been so inspiring these days, don't you think?"

"They say the good Miss Good is naughtier than the naughty Miss Good."

"That's why I wanted to see her; I'd have liked to see what impression she'd make on Hugh."

"What's that, Vivienne?" said Garfield, nodding a welcome to Oldham as he advanced.

"We were talking about the Miss Goods. Mr. Oldham's very disappointed they're not coming."

"Then perhaps it's just as well they're not!" said Garfield laughingly. "Have you fixed things up, Vi?"

"Yes. Mr. Oldham is going with you."

"That's good!" replied Garfield.

Calling a syce from the stables he waited until Oldham's horse was led away and then asked him to have a peg, an invitation which Oldham gladly accepted.

"I feel in quite a holiday spirit to-day, Oldham! I think I'll have a peg too," said Garfield, helping himself. "Here's luck!"

While they were raising their glasses to one another the Sinclair's car dashed through the entrance gate and pulled up under the porch with a jerk.

"What's this, Garfield?" said Mr. Sinclair, with a significant look at the glasses. "You are starting early!"

"Yes, got to get my eye in, you know."

"Good idea; I think I'm cock-eyed this morning! Nearly collided with your gate-post." Then with a very serious face, Sinclair added: "What do you prescribe, Doctor?"

"Harry!"

Mrs. Sinclair, who had done her best to persuade her husband to let the native chauffeur drive, as previously arranged, and failed, felt that the note of caution in her voice after their

close shave was thoroughly warranted. Sinclair, however, had also imbibed the holiday spirit and, not to be damped by anyone, he descended from the car and joined the two men in a drink.

A little later, helping Mrs. Garfield into her seat, he started the engine and, after struggling for a moment or two with his gears and letting in his clutch in a none too professional manner, literally jerked the car out of the porch and, with much grating and grinding, finally got into top gear and whizzed away.

Presently Garfield, with Oldham beside him and the syce balancing himself on the glorified step at the back of the trap, which in India is termed "the syce's seat," was rattling along the highroad in the wake of the Sinclair's car.

Shortly after passing the sixth milestone he was astonished to find a group of villagers stretched across the road, salaaming hurriedly and raising up their hands as an indication for him to stop.

"I wonder what these chaps want."

"Don't take any notice of them. They probably think you're the Deputy Commissioner and want to present a petition! I'd drive on if I were you."

The villagers were now about thirty yards ahead and Garfield wondered whether he should pull up or not. He was not certain that Oldham's surmise was correct, and was about to draw in his reins when the villagers divided, leaving the road clear for him to proceed.

"I told you so," said Oldham. "It's only a

petition, and now they see you're not the Deputy Commissioner they don't want to stop us."

The trap had almost passed when one of the villagers shouted out: "It is the Doctor Sahib!" and as though that were the signal for action several members of the crowd ran after them shouting: "Sahib! Sahib! There is great trouble in our village. A bear has mauled a woman and she is in great pain."

"You're surely not going to bother yourself about a case like this?"

"I must."

"But they can send for the Doctor Babu; we'll be late for the picnic. It's just like these lazy devils, waylaying you on the road and not sending her to the Station hospital."

Garfield had, however, already pulled up, and three or four excited villagers were relating how the woman, in the early morning, had gone to wash in the pond by the sugar cane, when a she bear, with two cubs, had attacked her.

Presently the moaning and wailing of a woman, accompanied by the constant cry of "Bapri bap," made the occupants of the trap turn their heads, and they saw, some twenty yards away, a woman, assisted by two almost naked men, advancing towards them.

One glance showed them the terrible injury she had suffered. Her sari was covered with blood, her forehead was intact and the eyes uninjured, but below the flesh had been torn from the bone. All that remained of the nose

were two holes. The lips had gone, exposing the bleeding gums and white teeth. The whole lower part of the face was nothing but a bleeding skeleton, and the vividness of the blood-oozing bones sent a shudder through Oldham.

Garfield was out of the trap in a moment, giving orders to his syce.

"Bring me my bag, then take the guns and cartridges out, and you drive back with this woman to the Station," then turning to Oldham he said: "It's a hospital case; I can do nothing with her here."

"You're surely not going to send her back in your trap? They can send her on in a bullock cart."

Garfield did not reply, he helped the woman into the trap and, bidding his syce take her to the hospital as soon as possible, told him to send the first tonga he came across to pick them up.

"Well, Garfield, I do think this is rot! It'll be over an hour before any blessed tonga gets here and we've another six miles to go and the shoot begins at twelve."

"I can't help it; that woman'll get blood poisoning if she's not attended to pretty quickly."

Oldham, seeing Garfield was in no mood to argue the point, lit a cigarette and walked a little way down the road.

Meanwhile Garfield continued to ask questions about the accident, and showed anxiety as to the whereabouts of the bear. The local Chowkidar *

* A part-time police constable

immediately took the stage and, full of official importance, began to detail how he had exerted his authority to force the village shikari* to track the animal to its lair, when a shout was raised that the man was in sight.

A few seconds later an excited, wild, dishevelled looking man was talking volubly to the crowd in general and Garfield in particular. In excited language and with finger pointed to a sal jungle in the distance, he detailed the deeds of prowess he had accomplished in tracking the bear to a cave, and then implored the "Sahib" to come and shoot it before it did further damage; an exhortation which produced murmurs of approval from the whole company.

"What's the hubbub now," said Oldham as he approached.

"This shikari has tracked the bear to a cave in the jungle over there, and wants us to shoot it. I think it's a good idea, what do you say? He says it's only half a mile away."

"Well, I think it's a pretty rotten idea! In the first place that jungle is within the beat and the Rajah won't thank us for going and blazing our guns in it. And you know what these devils mean when they talk about half a mile. When you've gone half a mile it's always a little further, and by the time you get to the spot you've walked about three, and you find the bear gone!"

"Oh, not at this time of the day, Oldham, it won't budge now until the sun's well down."

* Tracker and hunter.

"Well, I'm not going. We'll only be wasting our time and we'll be later than ever. Besides, I don't think it fair on the Rajah to go and disturb one of the jungles he's going to beat."

"All right, Oldham, you please yourself, but I've got a grudge against that particular bear, and I don't mind walking two miles if there's a chance of getting it."

"But we'll get it in the beat."

"You know as well as I do that the guns are to lined up about six miles away; you don't think they're going to drive a she bear with two cubs six miles, do you? There'd be more work for me if they tried it on."

"Well, if you're so keen on it, go. But I'll wait here."

Garfield picked up his gun and, handing it to the shikari, and a bag of cartridges to one of the villagers, beckoned to the former to lead the way.

After walking about two hundred yards he heard a call to stop and, turning round, he saw Oldham making efforts to overtake him.

"Wait for me, Garfield! I can't let you go on foot to shoot a she bear with two cubs, it's too jolly dangerous. They're devilish hard to hit, you know. When they're roused their hair stands out and you'd think you'd got a jolly big target, but you haven't, so I'm coming with you."

"That's good!"

In ten minutes they were at the edge of the jungle and Oldham, in a voice which clearly

showed that he mistrusted the shikari in every way, said : " Now, where *is* that bear ? "

" About half a mile, Sahib."

" There you are," said Oldham, throwing out his hand and addressing Garfield, " didn't I tell you ? It was half a mile away when we started and it's still half a mile." Then, addressing the shikari, he said in Hindustani : " You son of a pig, you told us the bear was half a mile away, we've walked nearly a mile and it's still half a mile away ! We'll go another half a mile and if we don't see the bear I won't go a yard further, do you understand ? "

" I understand, Sahib," replied the shikari, continuing to lead on.

They walked for another ten minutes when Oldham halted. Almost beside himself with anger, he began to speak, commencing with a string of epithets, but the shikari held up his hand for silence.

" She's quite close, Sahib, don't make a noise. You stay quietly here and I'll creep up to the cave and have a look." Then without waiting for a reply he stole ahead and in a minute or so was lost in the jungle.

Oldham, at last convinced that they were near the cave, relapsed into silence. After a few minutes the cracking of twigs could be heard, and in another minute the shikari re-appeared.

" Right, Sahib, she's still there. You can just see a part of her body in the mouth of the cave."

Following the usual procedure in such a case,

the men tossed up for first shot and the luck fell to Oldham, who proceeded to load his double barrelled 450 "Express" rifle. The Doctor possessed no rifle. He had sacrificed sport in the interests of his work, and his weapon was an ordinary smooth bore double barrelled shot gun. Into this he slipped a couple of ball cartridges and handed his cartridge bag to the shikari. He took, however, the precaution of putting two extra cartridges in his pocket, and having suggested to Oldham to do the same he then signified their readiness to advance.

After proceeding cautiously for a hundred yards or so the shikari came to a sudden stop and, shaking his head despairingly, said: "Too much noise."

Garfield spoke a few whispered words and waved the villagers back.

The party continued their advance, only to be pulled up again by the shikari before they had proceeded very far.

"No good, Sahib. Too much noise."

This second interruption thoroughly annoyed Oldham and, turning round with an angry glare on his face, he spoke to the head man of the village in a voice which was none the less vehement because of its low tone.

"If you can't keep these swine back I'll give someone a damn good licking before I've finished!"

He waited impatiently until his words had been communicated to the straggling villagers,

who reluctantly fell back, leaving the party free to advance again.

Presently the stealthy antics of the shikari, becoming more pronounced, told the two men that they were not far from their quarry. A moment later the shikari turned and, pointing to the edge of a nullah some twenty yards away, gesticulated wildly to indicate that they should wait until he had made another inspection.

Slowly and cautiously the man crept to the edge of the nullah and, bending over, stood motionless gazing at something beneath him. Then, withdrawing a few yards, he motioned the Sahibs to approach.

As they came up he grasped the doctor by the right arm, led him forward and, pointing at the mouth of the cave, which appeared scarcely big enough for a bear to pass through, said: "See, Sahib, there is the bear," and then turned to Oldham and indicated to him the same spot.

Both men had already lowered the safety catch of their weapons and, side by side, they stood peering intently into the mouth of the cave, situated on the opposite side of the dry stream which ran at the bottom of the nullah; but all they could see was the darkness of the hole.

"Can you see anything, Oldham?" Garfield whispered.

"No, I can't!"

"Well, it's your first shot. You'd better fire into the cave."

Oldham raised his gun. There was a flash of

light, a deafening report, and both men stood, their weapons at the shoulder, waiting for developments; but all was silent.

For a few seconds they waited, eyes and ears alert, and then Garfield, thinking that the need for caution had passed, said in a perfectly natural voice. "I don't think there's anything there."

"I'm sure there isn't! I told you the chap was a liar from the start."

"Well, I'm going to have a bang. Slip another cartridge in your rifle."

Oldham did so and a second later Garfield fired. Still nothing happened, but as a precautionary measure he ejected the spent cartridge and slipped in another.

"Have another whack, Oldham, it's your turn, and then if nothing happens I'll go down and have a look in."

The report of Oldham's rifle had hardly died away when there was the sound of an angry howl. The mouth of the cave seemed to enlarge and out rushed a big she bear with its mouth open, its red angry eyes aflame.

In less time than it takes to narrate, the bear had crossed the stream bed in one bound and was racing up the slope; lunging from side to side with the movement of its ungainly legs, its shaggy coat hiding the rapid movements of its feet. Its onrush was so sudden and awe-inspiring that both men were taken aback. And before they realised what had happened the bear was on the edge of the slope, not more than half a

dozen yards from them, in spite of the fact that they had involuntarily drawn backwards, giving ground.

The bear now clearly saw its enemies, and, rising on its hind legs, the terrorising spectacle of a standing bear gathering itself for the fatal charge was before them. With its forelegs outstretched and its gleaming three-inch long talons ready to strike, with a force that would tear the flesh from the bone, the sight was enough to unnerve any man.

The frightened yells from behind as the villagers crashed through the undergrowth, running in all directions, increased the unnerving effect, and Garfield was cognisant of an emptiness below the belt and an uneasy feeling of apprehension.

It was the first time he had ever faced a bear on foot and the look of the mad, angry snarling animal stayed the beating of his heart. But his mind was cool and calm. He remembered those words of Oldham : " Their hair stands out and you'd think you'd got a jolly big target," and he knew that to miss meant, at the very least, an appalling disfigurement for life.

He was not going to miss ! For an infinitesimal portion of a second he stood motionless and waited ; waited until the bear was almost at the end of his gun, then he fired both barrels. Bang ! Bang ! The shots rang out in quick succession. Then came an agonising ear-piercing howl, and the bear rolled down the slope mortally wounded.

But the tenacity of life of these creatures was

known to Garfield, and he rightly judged that the animal was not out of the fight. It was the shock more than anything else that had sent it rolling down the slope and, though bleeding profusely, it still had sufficient strength to attack.

Keeping his eyes steadily on it, he opened the breach of his gun and inserted the remaining cartridge. The bear had now pulled itself together. Its anger and fury were almost diabolical in their intensity and it charged up the slope again.

Garfield found he could not close the breach. The cartridge had jammed! He turned with the intention of asking Oldham to fire (for he had waited in vain for his support) while at the same time he made a desperate effort to remove the jammed cartridge. . . . Oldham had gone!

With beads of cold perspiration on his brow he turned and shouted for his cartridge bag. The shikari, also, had disappeared!

There was nothing now for Garfield to do but retreat. Dropping the spoiled cartridge he backed away, shouted again for the missing bag, and inwardly cursed himself for not having taken the precaution of putting more cartridges in his pocket.

That second shout brought the shikari from his hiding place. "Here you are, Sahib, here you are!" he cried, coming from behind a tree and speaking in a voice which was meant to indicate that he had always been at Garfield's elbow.

He held the bag open and the Doctor's fingers

closed on the first two cartridges that came to hand.

The bear had once more surmounted the slope and, though its wounds were telling on its strength and its movements were less agile, its maternal instinct was roused again to fever pitch at the sight of the man who had dealt it such a mortal blow.

Once more it gave a defiant, angry snarl. Garfield realised that this was no time to pick and choose, and one ball and one shot cartridge went into his gun.

With the supernatural strength of an animal in its death throes, it rose on its hind legs and charged with mad, infuriated ferocity just as Garfield fired again.

A moaning wail of pain rang out as the pellets of the shot-cartridge which Garfield had fired at such short range opened a huge gaping wound which was clearly visible in spite of the animal's thick fur.

It fell heavily on all fours, its head almost touching the ground, swaying slowly from side to side, with blood and bloody froth streaming from its mouth and nostrils. For a second or two it remained thus, Garfield hesitating to fire the other cartridge in case, in its death agony, it should charge again.

But the poor beast had no charge left in it. Its legs crumpled and it fell on its side, giving vent to agonising moans like a human being in the grip of a painful death.

“ By George, Garfield, you did that well ! ”

It was on the tip of Garfield's tongue to say something about being left in the lurch, but, shrugging his shoulders, he contented himself with the remark : “ Well, Oldham, that brute won't give me any more work, thank God ! ”

There was a note of thankfulness and relief in the way he emphasised “ thank God ! ”

CHAPTER XXI

GARFIELD came in for a good deal of hero worship, for the villagers were almost beside themselves because the bear, which had done so much damage to their crops, and terrorised the neighbourhood, was dead. But the Doctor was not inclined to hero worship, and besides, his thoughts were too bitter.

It was the shikari who, after his first fright, had come to the rescue, not his companion; and he and Oldham retraced their steps in silence.

They had about half an hour to wait before the tonga appeared and tiffin was nearly over by the time they arrived at their destination.

Partaking of a hasty meal they sought to make up for lost time, for already could be heard the spasmodic beating of distant drums, telling them that the beaters were taking up their allotted stations, village by village, as the Rajah's head shikari had arranged.

This annual shoot was a great affair. Every raiyot's tenure was based on rent and service. Every able-bodied man who held land belonging

to the State, together with his wife and grown-up sons, had to work a definite and predetermined number of days in each year for the benefit of the Rajah, at what was nothing but a nominal hire.

They tilled the soil, sowed and reaped the crops, on the land which the State retained, for a wage of about a halfpenny a day; and, although it was not laid down in their tenancy agreements, custom, from time immemorial, laid a claim on the free service of the whole male population on the occasion of the Rajah's annual shoot.

This free service was gladly given, not only for the sport itself, but for the opportunity it provided for social intercourse, for the discussion of outstanding differences and, last but not least, for the ribald gossip and jollification which was indulged in round the liquor shops when the day's sport was over.

Long before the shoot was timed to begin, every village marshalled its adult male inhabitants, roping in everyone capable of an arduous day's tramping; and every village troupe, following their tom-tom beaters, foregathered from the nethermost parts of the State.

Throughout the night many of these parties had marched to the muffled beats of their village tom-toms, and so used were they to the arrangements, and so well did they know the surrounding country, that the minimum of organisation was necessary, in order to ensure that each party took

up its allotted station soon after dawn on the day of the shoot.

The distant spasmodic tom-tomming now taking place was speaking a special language. Each village was sending the message to the central station that they had made contact with their neighbours on each side.

After half an hour or so the tiffin party broke up, and then everyone drew slips out of a hat for their places in the matchans.*

Oldham and Vivienne, to their mutual satisfaction, were drawn together and, as the men and women threaded their way in single file along the circuitous and narrow jungle path, they kept up an animated conversation.

A holiday feeling was in the air.

Suddenly Vivienne gave an exclamation of surprise. The track had opened on to a belt of felled jungle, some sixty or seventy yards wide, stretching for a mile or more on either side of the spot on which she stood.

She had never imagined such a scene! Over hill and dale, as far as the eye could see, the jungle extended, the autumn tints of its leaves mellowing into the distant haze with the colourings of a Turner landscape. Lofty trees with their interlaced branches, made a huge precipice of autumnal foliage on each side of the jungle-felled belt.

* The matchan is a raised platform made of saplings cut from the jungle, camouflaged by high screens made of twigs and leaves, with a canopy overhead composed of piled-up boughs and branches, supported at each corner by stout poles, entrance to which is obtained by means of improvised ladders

The predominating colour was yellow and, in the setting of a clear blue cloudless sky, the jungle looked like a gigantic cornfield, and the belt of felled jungle like a straw-tossed pathway which had been cut by some giant with a colossal scythe for a huge reaping machine to pass.

Although the sun was high in the heavens, and the burning of its rays none too pleasant, a cool refreshing breeze swept over the scene at intervals and for a second or two drove away some of the glare and the dancing heated haze. Now and again was heard the violent rustling of leaves when some wind devil swept down the belt, drawing up the fallen leaves as it passed along, swirling them higher and higher till they were thrown violently into the upper air, when they would drop idly like miniature kites to the ground.

As Vivienne's eyes travelled up and down that devastated belt she thought of the work that the felling and cutting had involved and, with the huge jungle on either side of it, experienced a sense of the insignificance of herself, her companion and the barefooted natives who accompanied them.

She felt as if they were all field mice in a cornfield, awaiting the rattle of the dreaded reaping machine which would shortly tumble the cornstalks about their ears.

The vastness of the jungle impressed her, the felled belt fascinated her, for nothing broke the track save the line of matchans down the centre,

distanced from one another about two hundred yards, and, here and there, a large tree which had presented too much difficulty in cutting. But even these had had their lower branches drastically lopped. And along that belt the life-destroying rifles would shortly ring out.

Advancing a little way into the belt, Oldham gave the number of their matchan to a clerk of the Rajah, who was standing in the shade of a large tree, and the Babu directed one of the forest peons to show them the way.

The peon, signalling them to follow, led them a short distance down the clearing. Then, bearing to the left, he branched off into another jungle path, and after following its devious way for a few minutes they found themselves in the belt again, opposite the matchan they were to occupy.

Following their guide, Vivienne, with her tight skirt, found a difficulty in mounting the improvised ladder.

The rungs in places were as much as two feet apart and it was only with Oldham's aid, who advanced step by step with her, keeping one rung ahead, and the help of the forest peon, who placed her foot on each rung as she mounted, and held it there until she was ready for another step, that she finally succeeded in forcing her way through the narrow opening in the screen and found herself on the uneven, sapling-made floor of the matchan.

For a second or two she and Oldham stood side by side taking in their surroundings. The couple

in advance of them were now engaged in mounting the ladder of their matchan. They were Mrs. Forsythe and Major Garfield. Vivienne could not repress a smile at the awkwardness which Mrs. Forsythe's ascent presented, and she wondered if she had looked so ungraceful when she was mounting the ladder.

Tom! . . . Tom! . . . Tom-a-tom! Tom!

The sound of the drums on their extreme left reverberated through the still air. Not a leaf was moving, not even a bird was to be seen; the jungle looked dead or asleep.

Bung! . . . Bung! . . . Bung-a-bung! Bung!

The deep notes of the largest tom-tom the State possessed sounded directly in front of them.

"Oh, they're not far away, Mr. Oldham!"

"Aren't they! Six or seven miles at least."

"Why, they sound quite near!"

Tom! . . . Tom! . . . Tom-a-tom! Tom!

The tom-toms on their extreme right were sending out their message, and hardly had the vibrations died away when the drums in front boomed again.

Now, from the centre towards the right and left flanks, innumerable tom-toms rolled out their signal, and as the rattle swept along the vast line of beaters, the faint roar of thousands of human voices was borne on the air.

The advance had begun.

Then followed noises and twitterings in the jungle. Crow-pheasants, jays and innumerable birds were flying agitatedly across the clearing,

passing backwards and forwards at intervals as the shouting and drumming rose and fell.

For some minutes Vivienne stood, looking first in this direction and then in that, her excitement rising and falling as the noise of the distant beaters rose to a crescendo and died away. She half expected to see the wild denizens of the jungle scuttle across the clearing, but save for the twittering and agitation of the birds it was still asleep.

Oldham, watching her the while, was fascinated by the heightened colour in her cheeks, the excitement in her eyes.

"They don't seem to get any nearer! When will the tigers come out?"

"Oh, it'll go on like this for about two hours. We might as well sit down."

"We won't be able to see! And suppose anything comes out?"

"We won't see anything for an hour or more, and we'll have plenty of warning. There are natives up in the trees over there. Do you see that chap in that big sal tree right in front of us? He'll imitate some jungle bird's cry if anything's coming. If you're going to stand all the time you'll be jolly tired long before the fun begins."

Oldham arranged the cushions, taken from the Doctor's trap, and pressed her to be seated. A moment later they were sitting side by side, and that most dangerous of all whisperers—propinquity!—got to work.

CHAPTER XXII

OLDHAM's intimacy with the Garfields had prepared the way for what followed. For many weeks past he had spent, with few exceptions, his evenings with them. He had learnt much about them and thought he knew the exact relationship between husband and wife.

Although his contempt for a Eurasian was not dead, in Garfield's case it was tempered by an admiration he could not withhold. He admired the Doctor's patient way of dealing with Vivienne. He put it down to an innate courtesy and kindness, but not love. He imagined that the dislike which Vivienne, on occasion, evinced for her husband, was secretly reciprocated in a minor degree by him. He appeared to Oldham as though he were hiding his real feelings, and though this deduction was correct, he was wrong in thinking that the feelings which the Doctor was hiding were those of disaffection. He did not know that Garfield was chewing the cud of disappointed hope.

In these circumstances, Oldham allowed himself to be swayed by Vivienne's fascination more,

perhaps, than he otherwise would have done, but he did not attribute to her virtues she did not possess. He had summed her up correctly. She was an admiration worshipper, and though he did not feel that she would sacrifice herself on the altar of admiration, he knew his constant attention to her was ripening their friendship and establishing bonds of understanding.

He knew he had now considerable influence over her, and, though he sometimes speculated on possibilities, the trust and confidence which Garfield reposed in him had, up till now, acted as an opiate on thoughts which might otherwise have been extremely active.

How Vivienne led up to that conversation in the matchan, which was to brush aside these restraining influences, Oldham could never afterwards remember, although he tried on several occasions. He could only recall a sense of pleasurable excitement in listening to her words.

After a while Vivienne, tired of sitting in one position, moved her cushion and sat facing him. It was then propinquity began its whispers, The alluring outlines of her figure, her slim waist, her small well-shaped feet and hands made a silent appeal ; while the animated ever-changing expressions which lit up her face and the appealing look which now and again came into her eyes, definitely stirred his being for the first time.

“ I wonder why you’ve never married ? ”

“ Never been asked, I suppose.”

"Don't be ridiculous, Mr. Oldham! Women don't ask."

"Oh, don't they! It's a man's privilege to propose, but no one but a fool proposes until the woman's asked him."

"I never asked Hugh."

"I bet you did!—In some subtle way."

"What *do* you mean?"

"Well, I suppose you let him see you wanted him— isn't that asking?"

"You speak like a man of experience! Did you ever propose? Tell me!" she said coquettishly.

Oldham reflected. He recalled a calf love of his, and because he thought he wanted sympathy and understanding, and nothing more at the time, his active mind framed a reply which was only half a truth,—it would stimulate the sympathy he wanted.

"Well, I was in love once, and I think she was in love with me. At any rate, I always flatter myself that it was so. But my prospects at the time were not very grand; I didn't like swotting! And because I wanted to go abroad my pater got me a job as a planter. When the girl learned that a planter has very little position and even less pay I think her feelings changed, or perhaps they were changed for her; I don't want to misjudge her. Position and money are not my gods and I thought they weren't hers; so one day I spoke about love in a cottage and all that sort of thing."

Oldham paused to collect his thoughts. It was rather a long speech for him to make.

"Go on! Do tell me all about it; every little detail."

"Well, I hinted we might try it, but she wasn't having any."

"Did you kiss her?"

"Oh, I suppose I did, but not the last time I saw her."

"Were you *very* upset?"

"I was at the time. I thought I was in love, you know. But I know now I wasn't."

Vivienne blushed. She thought she knew why Oldham had used the word "now," and she looked at his lips and wondered what the girl felt like when they had touched hers. She gave a sigh.

"Silly girl!" she murmured. There was a note of relief in her voice. "But go on, tell me everything!" she added after a pause. "Didn't you try to persuade her?"

"No, I didn't. I suppose I was too young, and it wasn't the real thing, you know. I pretended I'd just asked her an ordinary question and didn't really mean it, and I don't think I felt the refusal over much at the time, for she told me that only a day or two before she had accepted someone else. So I put the best face on things I could and laughed it off. I think I mentioned that old gag about there being as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it."

"That must have hurt her if she loved you. But go on—what did she say?"

"She said: 'You don't seem to take it very seriously, Frank,' and I was young enough to spout a bit of poetry. That time-honoured old jargon, you know: 'If she be not fair to me, what care I how fair she be,' and, by George, to tell you the truth, I thought it a splendid bit of poetry at the time! Whoever wrote the silly words can flatter himself that they've comforted many a love-sick calf. At any rate, they comforted me. I suppose I was what you might call dancing mad at the way I'd been treated, and I think I left her in the belief that I didn't care the proverbial damn."

"And didn't you?"

"Didn't I! I repeated that piece of poetry so often to myself that it got to look pretty threadbare before I'd finished with it, and when I realised that someone else was going to have the right to her I found I did care a damn, and a great big damn, too! I walked up and down deserted streets cursing myself, and, in my thoughts, worshipping her. What the underlying influence was that made that night of misery I don't know, but it was an awful night."

"I suppose, Frank, it's the worst you've had?"

His name, as she uttered it, did not seem an innovation; he only thought it an expression of her sympathy.

"Oh, I had a worse experience once before. Now I'm in the confessional I might as well make a clean breast of my sins! I was about seventeen at the time and as long and lanky as a yard of

pump water ! I fell in love with the principal girl who was playing the part of Cinderella at the Lyceum. She had such beautiful soft eyes, and that fascinating complexion one only sees on the stage—you know the sort of thing—a creamy, transparent complexion that makes you think its owner has come straight down from Heaven ! My recollection is that she had that kind of look too, and the most shapely legs I've ever seen. She showed a fairly large proportion of them in her rags and tatters ! ”

“ So you fell in love with her legs ? ”

“ I don't know what it was I fell in love with, but when the Prince, with his arm round her waist, said he would marry her, I felt like kicking him. I bought a photograph of her as I left the theatre, to learn from the name at the bottom that she was married, and then I wanted to kick her husband ! It was the dearest five and sixpence worth I've ever had ! It put me off eating for a couple of days, and any other girl for about twelve months. I believe I still have her well-kissed photograph knocking about the bungalow somewhere.”

“ What a tragedy ! ”

“ Oh, you can laugh ! ”

“ And what was the girl's name ? ”

“ Ella something or other.”

“ I mean the girl you proposed to ? ”

“ Oh, Winifred Dunn.”

“ And she didn't want you ? ”

"I don't think anyone's ever wanted me."

"Well, I wouldn't have said no, if you'd asked me."

Was he dreaming? Had she really said those words? Was that distant tom-tomming and shouting real? Was she really facing him in the seclusion of the matchan? For some unaccountable reason those words had struck him like a blow, and he felt the dream would fade. He felt also an inclination to take her hand, but he knew his own were trembling. He dared not even trust himself to speak.

It was his restraint which completed the damage. Had his hand touched hers, had his tongue expressed his thoughts, Vivienne would have recoiled, for she, also, realised the import of the words which had been wrung from her, and something inside her was whispering words of caution.

Oldham rose with a stern and thoughtful look on his face.

"I think we ought to be standing now. The beaters are getting close."

They *were* getting close, and Vivienne had not noticed it. With a feeling that she had lowered herself she, too, rose. She had shown her feet of clay and the man had ignored her appeal. Now she must try to blot out the memory of her words and re-establish herself in his eyes.

Vivienne did not know that with such thoughts she was registering a vow to play with fire, and that the keeping of the vow would strike a blow at the roots of her self-respect.

There was a low whistle and Oldham nudged Vivienne.

"Look out ! There's something coming."

The sound of the tom-toms and human voices rose to a crescendo and died away. For a few seconds there was silence. Then came the sound of stealthy footsteps crackling the dead leaves in front of them.

Oldham brought his rifle to a handy position. Vivienne held her breath.

The low whistle was repeated. A tom-tom nearby rolled out a quick message, and all down the line an excited roar from thousands of throats, backed by the animated beating of tom-toms, followed.

Vivienne, almost beside herself with excitement and trembling from head to foot, gazed admiringly at the tense, taut features of Oldham.

Then there followed another period of silence. The footsteps drew nearer. They sounded loud and ominous, and Vivienne's eyes were rivetted on the jungle immediately in front of them from whence the sounds came.

There was a movement of the undergrowth. She saw it distinctly. Something dark flickered for the fraction of a second, and suddenly there stepped into the felled belt a bewildered-looking peacock.

Cautiously, it took a few steps forward, and then, rising in the air, flew with noisy flutterings across the belt, followed by a score or more of others. Oldham lowered his rifle.

"Sucks again!" he ejaculated boyishly. Then, remembering Vivienne's presence, he added: "We're always being had at these shoots. Peacocks, you know, make more row than tigers. They're not so stealthy. But I'm always being taken in!"

He had hardly spoken when a shot rang out on the left, immediately followed by a fear-curdling roar.

Something yellow and shining leapt in the air, but it was yellow against a yellow background and Vivienne thought she had imagined it.

Followed the noise of crashing undergrowth. Bang! . . . She felt the sting of it in her ears.

"What is it?" she said exultantly, feeling that she wanted to fly across the belt and make a personal investigation.

"Be quiet! A tiger. It's coming," Oldham whispered spasmodically.

A few twigs quivered. Vivienne was aware of a quick movement, a deafening crack! Her ears were singing, and with fascinated eyes she followed the rising, faint blue smoke and watched it disperse in the air.

"It's dead!"

The noise of the gun fire urged the beaters to greater efforts. From one end of the line to the other the roar was deafening. It seemed to suggest that the jungle was full of wild beasts.

They heard the faint crack of rifles in the distance; a regular fusillade on their left, and another mighty roar from the tom-toms and beaters.

After an interval of a few minutes, came spasmodic rifle fire right and left, and Vivienne, strung to the highest pitch of excitement and with ears attuned to the medley of sound, detected movements in front of them. The jungle was crackling again.

Excited of eye, she pointed her finger in the direction. Oldham's rifle sprang to his shoulder.

Suddenly, out into the belt stepped a shiny-skinned native, carrying a large bamboo stick! Others followed, and down the line of jungle facing them the beaters emerged, like ants, into the open clearing, and squatted on their haunches. Their work was over.

The shoot was finished, and Oldham had the honours of the day. Garfield had missed with both barrels. This was clearly established a little later, for the tiger had exposed his right flank to Garfield, and it was the left flank, presented to Oldham, which the solitary bullet had penetrated.

In spite of the fact that Oldham had the honours, Vivienne experienced a sense of disappointment. A solitary tiger, three bears, a couple of pigs and a wounded sambur appeared to her a paltry bag for such a prodigious effort. Even Oldham's assurance that it was a very satisfactory result for a Christmas-bumble-puppy shoot, failed to allay her feelings of disappointment.

CHAPTER XXIII

"YOUR wife, Major, is very pretty. I should look after her if I were you."

"Look after her, Rajah? She can look after herself."

"Can any woman?"

"Yes, when she's trusted."

It was the night of the shoot and the Rajah's customary dance to the Station was in progress. In his State robes he had received his guests and, with the exception of Garfield, had extended his hand and given every one a graceful welcome. There was, however, no lack of courtesy in the respectful salaam with which he greeted the Doctor.

In a few minutes he would depart, leaving them to enjoy the sumptuous supper which would be served in the club dining room at his expense. For only on ceremonial occasions did he sit at table with Europeans, and when he did he partook of no food. His caste rules forbade it.

Hugh's eyes, with many others, were, when the Rajah spoke, following Oldham and his wife in their graceful mastery over the intricate steps of

the latest dance. Every couple seemed clumsy in comparison.

A casual onlooker, who saw the dreamy expression in her eyes, the animation in his, the understanding and sympathy in their movements, might have been excused the thought that they were bride and bridegroom.

"How like a native not to trust a woman in any circumstances!" That thought flashed through Garfield's mind. The Rajah's words created no feeling of indignation.

He felt proud of Vivienne. . . . "Your wife, Major, is very pretty." . . . The words floated again and again through his mind.

He gave an amused chuckle. He did not particularly associate the Rajah's comments with Vivienne. He felt they were both generalising: he, from his point of view, the Rajah from his.

"Englishwomen can look after themselves all right," said Garfield, after a pause. "You know they've been brought up for generations in freedom."

"Yes, Major, but an ever widening freedom, huh? Some fifty or sixty years ago you did not trust an unmarried girl without a chaperone, or a young wife, for that matter. Their emancipation has been rather sudden, do you not think so?"

"Well, our beliefs are different from yours. I'm sure if an English wife thought she was being 'looked after' the husband would very quickly lose her love."

"Love is a man's prerogative; he is free to

obtain it where he will. A woman's duty is submission. She will love her husband if there is no one else to love. We do not believe in locking the stable door when the horse has gone. It is far better, Major, to lock it before. . . . However, I must be going."

With the Rajah's departure Garfield found himself pondering. Was there a warning in his words? He began to weigh up the pros and cons of his wife's love. It suddenly struck him how quiet and reserved she had been with him lately when they were alone together, and how animated and vivacious when others were present. But he threw off the little cloud of suspicion that floated across the sky of his mind.

If she had reserved her animation and vivacity for Oldham alone he might have attributed her increasing coldness to the right cause and forbidden him the house, but there was no marked difference, as far as he could judge, between her treatment of him and other men in the Station who showed her attention. Had he not heard her refuse Oldham a fourth dance? It was a comforting reflection.

But if he could have heard the conversation taking place in a certain *kala jugga* * he might have come to a different conclusion. . . .

"Why wouldn't you give me that other dance?" Oldham spoke irritably.

"Did you want it very much?"

"Well, I thought after the splendid day we've

* A closetted sitting-place Literally . place of darkness

had together in the matchan and driving back. . . ”

“ What would you give for another ? ” Vivienne produced her programme and tried to scan it in the indifferent light thrown by a solitary Chinese lantern.

“ Anything ! ”

She felt she was regaining his respect. She put her hand on his arm.

“ You really mean that ? ”

“ You know I do, Vi.”

“ Hush ! ”

“ Well, you called me Frank in the matchan.”

“ Yes, Frank.” She stood up and faced him and began to speak in a low whisper. “ I’ll give you the last extras. All of them. My husband’s going home after supper. He’s got an operation early to-morrow.”

“ Why didn’t you give me them before ? ”

“ I wished to see if you wanted them very much ! Besides, didn’t you see Hugh behind us ? And I wasn’t sure you really wanted them—not after . . . ”

“ After what ? ”

“ After you snubbed me in the matchan, Sir Galahad ! ”

“ I didn’t snub you, Vi.”

“ You know you did, Frank. You didn’t speak to me for over an hour.”

“ I couldn’t. If I had you might have snubbed me.”

“ I’d never do that. I couldn’t now, Frank—no matter what you did.”

Oldham could hardly believe his ears. He had not believed them when she had uttered those words: "I wouldn't have said no if you'd asked me." And yet only a woman, determined to avow her love, could have spoken like that. Had he been a fool? Had he been losing opportunities? It seemed incredible! Vivienne Garfield, with all her beauty, could have married anyone. What *did* she mean?

"Don't look so serious, Frank!" she pleaded. "I don't . . . *like* you when you're serious." Her lips parted in a demure smile as she hesitated between the words "love" and "like." Her eyes were laughing mischievously, mockingly, as she laid stress on the word of her choice.

Vivienne had very expressive eyes, and while speaking she had opened them wider than usual, and in the depths of their dark-blue pools lurked the invitation of Eve.

He stirred and flushed uneasily, for her eyes were speaking a language of maddening appeal. But he fought his racing blood, notwithstanding that the alluring outlines of her figure were battering against the floodgates of his mental control. Her fair skin, looking more fair in the multi-coloured glow of the Chinese lantern, her corn-coloured hair, shining like spun gold, seemed to cry out against the sacrilege of a human touch. She belonged to the gods, not to men! And Oldham had the feeling that to touch such an ethereal being would destroy for ever her god-bestowed gifts.

But Vivienne, bending towards him like a flower foolishly pleading to be plucked, stood, a temptress, and suddenly the floodgates of his mental control were opened wide and his pent up emotions found a voice.

“My God, Vivienne, why do you tempt me !” He sprang to his feet and faced her, a look somewhat akin to anger in his eyes.

But Vivienne knew it was not anger, and placing her hand on his arm she felt him tremble at the touch.

Into the already throbbing atmosphere of that kala jugga crept the seductive, hesitating notes of a new waltz—“The Dream Kiss.” They swelled to a crescendo of supplication, paused, as though gathering strength for another appeal in a language peculiarly their own, and as the appeal floated pleadingly on the air, he bent his head and crushed her lips with savage instinct. And the music sent their blood, charged with emotion, leaping madly through their veins.

CHAPTER XXIV

DURING the next day or two Garfield was conscious of a subtle change in his wife's behaviour.

Her conscience was forcing her to act like a child who has done something wrong and yet hopes, by an additional show of affection, to allay suspicion, and Hugh came to the conclusion that she was beginning to regret her petulant ways.

But Vivienne's contrition was short-lived. He met her advances more than half way. He showed more affection than she was prepared to welcome, and, as he became more demonstrative when they were alone together, her petulance and irritation returned. In time Garfield found himself dwelling on the Rajah's remark: "I should take care of her if I were you," and a suspicion crossed his mind that he was getting jealous.

That suspicion he held in restraint. He thought it unworthy of a man of his age.

He had married a young girl and it was only natural that she should enjoy the companionship of younger people. As for Oldham, Garfield was beginning to trust him, in fact he had come to like

him, despite that one occasion when he had shown the white feather. He did not realise that Oldham was acting a well-studied part.

Vivienne's society, ever since that kiss in the kala jugga, appeared essential to his happiness, and to secure it he studied the Doctor in every possible way.

Extraordinarily cunning by nature, he openly agreed with Garfield when his opinion was at conflict with his wife's. He never claimed her society when her husband was present unless the latter pressed it on him. And on one occasion a remark that Oldham had made in the club went a long way to allay suspicions.

Oldham was talking to Cosgrave at the time. . . .

"I hear the Garfields don't hit it off."

"Oh, they do—make no mistake about that. You can't always believe what you hear, Cosgrave. She's only young and, like all young things, wants the world at her feet, and is mad because there's no world in this Station. Why, there isn't a girl of her own age within a hundred miles. We all ought to do what we can to get her used to things. But the Doctor will win through all right, I'm sure."

Oldham and Cosgrave were the only two men in the bar at the time and Garfield, who was reading the notices on the board in the bridge-room, was astonished at the clearness of the whispered words. He did not know that Oldham was well aware of his proximity, and had regulated his whispers so that he should hear.

He did not know that the drifting of Vivienne was daily becoming more rapid ; that a mutual understanding was springing up between Oldham and his wife. Nor did he know that whenever the former sided with him he took the first opportunity to explain to Vivienne that he had done it to keep the peace, and that he was sorry she had to put up with a husband who did not understand her.

After the dance Vivienne had had a heart-to-heart talk with Oldham.

" You know, Frank, we mustn't do that again."

" Vi, it was my fault. But I couldn't help kissing you."

" No, it was my fault," she admitted frankly. " But if we don't make up our minds not to do it again we'll be doing something foolish."

" Oh, there's no harm in a kiss, surely ? "

" Well, I don't know, Frank. Sometimes I'm afraid."

" Afraid of our friendship ? "

She looked at him as she gave a sigh. " Friendship, Frank ? "

" Well, but we agreed to call it that, didn't we ? "

" Yes, but . . . You're going to give me that promise, aren't you ? "

" Why should I ? " he demanded, more for the sake of teasing her than out of regard for a promise that meant nothing to him.

" Because I love you, you know I do ! And it's because I value your love I'm asking you to

promise. It's wrong, and you said you would never soil our love."

Oldham laughed. "I thought we were to call it friendship! But kisses won't soil it, my darling."

"Oh, Frank, I wish I'd never been born! I shall hate myself if you don't promise."

"All right, Vi, I'll promise if you're really serious," he said soothingly.

They respected the compact for a few days, but the attraction between them was too strong for it to last, and matters were brought to a head by an unfortunate remark of Garfield, but one which was perfectly justified.

The three were dining together at the time.

"By the way, Vi, have you returned Mrs. Ismay's call?"

"Not yet, Hugh," Vivienne said indifferently.

Garfield looked annoyed. "My dear girl, you should have done it a week ago at least! It's nearly a fortnight since she called, and you know the jealousy which exists between the Cantonment and the Station. That's why we haven't received an invitation to the Colonel's garden party which the South Lancs. are giving to enable everyone to meet the new General."

"I don't want to go to a silly garden party to meet a wizened old General and his wizened old wife!"

Neither General nor Mrs. Ismay were in any way wizened and Vivienne knew it. She had met them at the club and had instinctively taken a

liking to both. And Hugh did not know that she was hiding her real motives.

She hated the thought of going to a garden party in one of her best trousseau frocks accompanied by a man who had a touch of the tar. She thought of the announcement which would be made on their arrival . . . "Major and Mrs. Garfield." And Hugh looked liked a native Subadur * in uniform. She could imagine the look that General Ismay would give when his eyes rested on her husband. They were such expressive eyes ; they almost spoke.

"Well, Vi, you must go. After all, the General is the General, and I think it's time you paid a little more attention to your social duties. When you're in Rome you must do as Rome does. You'll only get yourself disliked if you go on like this."

"Very well, I'll go and call now if you like !"

"Don't be silly, Vi. I'm not cross, it's only that you're young and don't understand how punctilious one has to be in matters of this kind. After all, the social courtesies are not many in this country."

Vivienne put her fingers in her ears and uttered the provocative word : "Lecture !" Then, seeing an angry look on her husband's face, she threw her hands petulantly on her lap.

"All right, Hugh dear," she said despairingly, with an ironical stress on the word "dear," "I'll call to-morrow, but if you see General Ismay

* Indian military officer

you can tell him I shan't be at the garden party, and I'll write a long letter to Mrs. Ismay telling her that nothing would have prevented my honouring their reception with my presence but the splitting headache which I'm going to have!"

She found Oldham's hand imprisoning hers.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed, assuming his rôle of oil-pourer on troubled waters, "*I've* forgotten to call on the Ismays. If you like, Mrs. Garfield, you can come with me to-morrow."

At that moment Garfield's bearer appeared on the scene with the cheroots and cigarettes. Vivienne, disengaging her hand, rose from the table, went into the drawing room and put on a dance record.

"Haven't you called on the General, Oldham?"

"Not yet," said Oldham, lying blandly.

"Well, I'd like you to take Vi, but in this case I think perhaps it would be better if I drove her round myself after tiffin to-morrow."

"Hugh, I can't get the gramophone to work; it's stuck!" Vivienne's voice came peremptorily from the drawing room.

"Well, my dear girl, I don't know anything about it. Perhaps you could put it right, Oldham?"

Oldham departed, and almost immediately there were sounds of laughter.

"There's nothing wrong with it, Mrs. Garfield, only you haven't wound it up."

Vivienne laughed at her intentional incom-

petence, the while Oldham managed to whisper the words: "*He's* going with you."

"Not you?"

Oldham shook his head. It was then Vivienne, throwing discretion to the wind, decided to act a part.

"Will you dance this with me, Hugh?"

"Oh, not just after dinner, Vi. Besides, I've got some work to do. I'll just finish this cigarette and leave you two. Oldham will dance it; but I don't know why you can't let us have a quiet smoke after dinner. You know it's the only thing I lay much stress on."

Vivienne was in no mood to be reproved and, looking like a temptress, she got up and began to dance by herself. Garfield sat and smoked, his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Come on, Mr. Oldham," Vivienne said, invitingly.

He advanced to join her with a rather bored expression on his face, and it appeared to Garfield that Oldham had felt constrained to go to her aid when he would have much preferred a quiet smoke. But it was Oldham who manœuvred her to the far end of the verandah where the shadows were thick, although Vivienne was a willing conspirator.

"Why did you take my hand?"

"I couldn't help it. I think he's just beastly to you!" whispered Oldham vehemently.

"You mustn't do it, Frank, the servants might

see." But the look in her eyes belied the reproofing tone she adopted.

A pillar hid Garfield from view, and Oldham suddenly drew her to him and kissed her passionately.

* * *

The demonstration of affection which passed between Oldham and Vivienne on this memorable night had not passed unnoticed. A few weeks later Vivienne's ayah broke the news that she would have to leave. Her sister had suddenly been taken ill and her presence was required at home.

It was in vain Vivienne tried to persuade her to stay until she could get another ayah, or, alternately to extract a promise that after the nursing was over she would return. Her replies were not very encouraging. . . . "God knew what was to happen, no one else. She would have to go at once, and how could she promise to return? Her sister was very ill and if she died she would have to take her sister's place, and look after the children and be a wife to her brother-in-law, as she had no husband of her own."

Vivienne was distressed beyond words. The only servant in the house who had given her satisfaction was her ayah, less perhaps because she did her work satisfactorily than on account of her continual praise of Oldham.

Her gossip amused Vivienne. Nine-tenths of what she heard she put down to the exaggerated flights of imagination in which native servants

love to indulge. But the tenth part, for reasons which she would have been at a loss to explain, she accepted in good faith and added a compound interest thereto which would have made a bank manager's mouth water.

It was a great blow to Vivienne when she realised her ayah's fixed determination to leave, and she poured her woes into Mrs. Sinclair's ear.

"Don't take it too seriously, Vi, natives are like that. She's probably made a good deal of money out of you and wants to go home and spend it! She'll come back right enough. It doesn't do to give ayahs too many cast off clothes—not in Ghurumpur—there's too good a market for them in the railway settlement!"

"But, Alice, I don't know what I'll do! I'll never get anyone who can take her place."

"I think I can help you. My ayah's leaving."

"Leaving! Why, I thought she was invaluable?"

"Oh, I'll get another."

"I suppose *you've* been giving away too many clothes!"

"Oh no, you see she doesn't want to go home yet—hasn't made enough!"

"Then why is she leaving you?"

"Well, she's been rather funny lately, and in a way I'm glad she's going. For the past week or two she's done nothing but quarrel with my husband's bearer. They had an awful row this morning and, as Harry says, one of them's got to go! You know what that means, Vi—the ayah.

For Gopi has been with my husband ever since he landed in the country."

"But couldn't you patch it up?"

"When a native man quarrels with a native woman there's no patching it up, my dear. According to their belief the man is always in the right, and if you want harmony in your compound you have to bear this sort of thing in mind."

"But it isn't just, Alice. I think men are bullies."

"Don't get that idea into your head. As Harry says, it's better to *appear* just in this country than *be* just, sometimes, and men have a lot to put up with. You know, women can be very trying at times;"

Vivienne did not like the turn the conversation had taken, and interrupted suddenly:

"You said you could help me, Alice?"

"Yes, I knew your ayah was leaving—Gopi told me. When he heard my ayah was going, he came at once and said that she was a good ayah and he bore her no grudge, only he couldn't stay if she remained. She was always insulting him before his wife, and he'd only put up with it for so long because he knew she was a good ayah to me. They're very considerate, these native servants."

"So Gopi knew my ayah was leaving before I knew it myself?"

Mrs. Sinclair laughed. "My dear Vi, we're the last people to hear when a servant is leaving! If you really want to know, your most confidential

servant will never tell you what another servant is going to do unless he has a grudge against him, so you mustn't take that to heart. But I knew you'd be very distressed so I asked ayah if she'd go to you and of course if you want her you can have her, she's a very good servant."

And so it happened that Mrs. Garfield's ayah left and Mrs. Sinclair's ayah took up her duties with Vivienne.

And the Rajah duly heard that his orders had been carried out.

CHAPTER XXV

GARFIELD was beginning to lose confidence in himself, and strive how he would he could not put the Rajah's words out of his mind. Until lately he had never doubted Vivienne's love and now, as he found himself doubting, he began to wonder if his method of dealing with her was on the right lines.

The knowledge, slowly borne in upon him, that the homage of men was absolutely essential to her happiness came as a great shock. She seemed bored with life if she did not get it, and perhaps, if she had been less indiscriminate with her favours, he would have put his foot down on Oldham's visits in spite of his growing appreciation of the man.

That indiscrimination was partly innate and partly the result of Oldham's tuition. The latter's affection for Vivienne was in no sense spiritual, although he was at pains to persuade himself and her that it was; and at times a sub-conscious knowledge that the attraction between them was animal mocked him.

A coward at heart, his instinct of self-preser-

vation prompted him, when alone, to fight the appeal she made. It was only when they were together, when her nearness exercised a subtle attraction, that he gave his affection rein, and often after leaving her he called himself many times a fool for his inability to keep his feelings within bounds.

It was when they were together that he schemed to protect himself against what he thought was a growing suspicion on Garfield's part. He encouraged her to seek the acquaintance of some of the younger officers in the regiments, and his behaviour in Garfield's presence became more and more discreet.

It was not Oldham now who always kept at her side in the paper chases, and several young officers could boast that they had had more dances with her than Oldham, and Oldham, on his part, occasionally showed such indifference to her in the presence of her husband that Garfield was forced to the conclusion that it was the admiration of men, and not the admiration of a particular man, which was her god.

As a result of their scheming their jealousy was stirred. Oldham hated to see her laughing, not to say coquetting, with other men, and Vivienne's jealousy was aroused because he appeared to be quite content in the company of other women; and jealousy fed the fire of the attraction between them.

Vivienne, at times, was also not without qualms of conscience, and when alone she would sit and

think of the "mess" she had made of her life. But she would battle with those qualms and argue herself into the belief that it was not her fault. . . .

"I ought to have known he was too old for me! I ought to have known that a man of thirty has married his career if he hasn't married a wife." It was all Hugh's fault, not hers!

She did not realise that her failure to acquaint her husband with the thoughts which passed through her mind, when she saw Mrs. Bell with the black baby at her breast, was a fatal error. She did not realise that it was her own fear of facing what she thought was the truth, that had done more than anything else to place a barrier between them. And so the "mess" was all his fault!

As the days passed her husband's more assiduous attention to his duty, and the exactions of his research work gave her a feeling of satisfaction: they had fewer opportunities of being alone together, and his neglect constituted an additional grievance.

She did not know that in burying himself in his work he was trying to forget his disappointed hopes.

She took it all as evidence of his altered feelings, and presumed that he was also realising the unsuitability of the union into which they had so rashly entered. And when these thoughts predominated she craved more and more for Oldham's society.

Vivienne and Oldham were well matched. He, without taking things too seriously, left no stone unturned to further his ends. Designedly, he had dropped that spirit of banter with which he had spoken of his jilted love, and he showed her a picture of his heart which was nothing but a lie.

Vivienne saw it as he intended her to see it—so torn and broken that it could never be healed. In a subtle way he implanted the belief that no one could ever take his lost one's place, and the jealousy that this belief fostered inclined her to greater indiscretions.

He was as much a born trifler as she was. They were two human beings wooing with their heads and not with their hearts, the animal uppermost in them both, with the advantage, if anything, on the man's side.

Vivienne knew she was playing with fire, but consoled herself with the thought that she had played with it over and over again in her short but varied life—as almost every girl has who indulges in promiscuous friendships. And because she had never let the flame extend beyond the boundaries of an ardent flirtation, she thought it would be possible to keep within those rather elastic boundaries once more.

She did not realise that she was more vulnerable now. She had not the prize of herself to guard nor the innate fear of the maid; nor did she realise that the love of a husband, which should have replaced her guard, was fatally missing, and that

she was defenceless because her love for Hugh was either dormant or dead.

She did not realise that her will was fettered and her powers of resistance weakened because of the blow her romance had received. Hugh, the only man who had really ever moved her until Oldham came on the scene, was, in her opinion, a broken reed. That Spanish blood was a myth, his pluck was nothing more than obstinacy, and his courage did not exist !

This was the state of affairs between Vivienne and Hugh when orders were received transferring Major Garfield temporarily to Bombay, for special duty in connection with a virulent epidemic of plague which had broken out in that city.

CHAPTER XXVI

"VIVIENNE, I suppose we're dining alone to-night?"

"No, Mr. Oldham's coming, of course."

"Oldham coming to-night? Hasn't he any sense!"

"Oh, yes," interrupted Vivienne, "but I particularly asked him."

"Well, Vi, I think we'd better put him off. It's our last night and we ought to be alone together."

He gave his wife a look full of meaning, for he meant to have a straight talk with her after dinner.

He had a presentiment that he might never have another chance, for the bubonic plague was killing off the inhabitants of Bombay at the rate of hundreds a day. He knew the ardour with which he would throw himself into his work, and the risk, from contact and exposure, to a man who was prepared to work long and arduous hours among the stricken.

"I don't see how we can put him off," Vivienne said petulantly. "If you had told me

earlier I wouldn't have sent the letter. I told him *you* particularly wanted him to come."

"I never said anything of the sort. I don't think I've mentioned his name to-day!"

"No, but I naturally thought you'd like him to dine on your last night. After all, he's been very kind to me and he's a great friend of yours. I'll feel an awful fool making excuses."

"Well, Vi, you know he stays so late. Never goes before half past ten, and I've a lot of things things to talk to you about."

"I hope you don't propose any long drawn out parting scene!" Vivienne snapped, irritated at the way he was looking at her.

She felt from his look that he wanted an eleventh hour reconciliation, and that was no part of her programme. She believed in the adage "As you make your bed so you must lie on it,"—at any rate as far as others were concerned—and she was determined that her husband should lie on his.

She failed to grasp that she was mainly responsible for the lumps in his mattress, or that it was her own shortcomings which had shattered her romance. She did not realise that Garfield's sins were the sins of omission, due to his firm belief that she really loved him and possessed a soul, that he was patiently waiting for the qualities which go with these blessings to come to her aid, and that the greatest charge that could be laid against him was that, in his ignorance, he was an accessory after the fact.

"No, I don't propose any long drawn out parting, Vi," he said slowly, barely hiding the wince which her words produced. "But of course I want to have a few words with you before I go. You'll see Oldham at the club and you can make some excuse then, he'll understand."

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" she retorted sharply. "I've asked him to dine and I'm not going back on it. If you want any lies told you can tell them yourself!"

"There's no need to tell lies, Vivienne. The man will understand—he's not a fool."

"Oh no, *he's* no fool, but he'll think I'm one!"

* * *

"Well, Doc, here's luck! Hope you come back safe and sound."

Oldham raised his glass and rather nervously gulped down its contents. He felt there was something significant in the way Garfield had insisted on their having a quiet drink together.

"By the way, Oldham," said Garfield, after lighting a cigarette, "we'll have to put you off to-night. I've got a lot of things to settle up with Vivienne. I hope you don't mind?"

"Not at all," responded Oldham, with that indifferent inflection in his voice which had done so much to disarm Garfield's suspicions. "As a matter of fact, I had fixed up with Cosgrave to dine at the club to-night. I only put him off because Mrs. Garfield made such a point of my coming, but it'll be all right when I see Cosgrave."

"I hope I haven't put you out? But Vivienne didn't realise the heap of things we've got to settle. Oh, and by the way, old chap, I want to thank you for being so good to her—taking her out paper chasing, tennis and all that sort of thing."

"Oh, it's nothing, Doc. I love games, you don't."

"Well, I haven't time, that's it. But you have given her a good deal of your time."

Oldham eyed Garfield suspiciously. He thought he understood what he was driving at, and he hastened to entrench himself behind an oft-repeated phrase of the Doctor.

"Well, I've done my best to help her to get 'used to things.'"

"Yes, of course, and I hope you'll allow her to entertain you at the club while I'm away instead of at the bungalow. You know, Mrs. Grundy! People talk in a small Station like this."

Oldham stiffened. "I don't think I require any hints! I know what's what."

Garfield was conscious that Oldham was on his defence, and the words of the Rajah recurred to him again, but before he could frame any reply Oldham, as though sorry for his outburst, held out his hand.

"Sorry, Doc, I didn't mean that. You took me unawares, that's all."

"You took me unawares." Garfield found his mind analysing the meaning of that sentence, and his suspicion grew stronger. And, although

they chatted in a cordial and friendly manner before they separated, Oldham was aware of the suspicion.

* * *

"I'm awfully sorry you're not dining with us, Frank," said Vivienne a little later, when the opportunity occurred for her to have a few words with Oldham.

"Honest Injun, Vi?" He gave her a searching look as he asked the question.

"Why ask? I thought we understood each other."

"Oh well, I quite understand you both want to be alone to-night!"

Vivienne noted the hidden jealousy in his voice and experienced a little wave of exultation.

"Don't be cross, darling, it's his last night. We'll be free now, and I won't feel such a hypocrite. It's been awful—having to keep up appearances in front of him! If it had gone on much longer I'd have done something silly. He never lets us have a minute together now, does he?"

"He's getting suspicious, Vi."

"No, silly! It's only because he's going away."

"Is it?" Oldham demanded with a challenging sneer.

"You *are* in a bad temper to-night, dear."

"Wouldn't you be? He's just told me we're not to dine or meet alone."

"He hasn't said *that*." She spoke the words in a frightened whisper.

"That's just what he has said, and if there's anything in the way he said it I fancy he'll have something to say to you. That's why I'm not dining with you to-night." He waited uneasily for her reply.

The alarm in her voice had suddenly dashed all his hopes. He had been looking forward to Garfield's departure with even greater expectations than she had, and now a frightened woman stood in front of him—a woman, he felt sure, who would be no match for Garfield if it came to a straight talk.

Oldham had both the instincts of the hunter and the hunted in him. At times he was apprehensive about Vivienne's feelings for him; at other times he was indifferent to them. If she had treated him with that cold aloofness she accorded to other admirers he would have more than worshipped her, but she had fallen such an easy prey that at times she ceased to appeal as an ideal prize.

But as she stood, alarmed and nervous before him, she appeared a prize worth winning, just because it looked to him that she was about to slip from his grasp.

He felt that a woman who could fear her husband could also love him, and there was no telling what promises she might give on her husband's departure. Her love might be re-born. . . .

Well . . . in that case, he argued to himself, he would have to put up with it and bide his time.

To plead now would be futile ; it would be better to plead later and taunt her with the frailty of human nature.

" I hope he won't say anything to me." She shivered. " I never thought he had a suspicion."

" Perhaps it's just as well, Vi. I've been getting too fond of you. I always knew you'd change ! "

" I've not changed a bit ! I think it's horrid of you to say that. I don't want to dine alone with him ; I only thought it best to let him have his way for once. But what on earth can he mean by saying I'm not to see you alone ? He *can't* suspect, Frank ? "

" Well, I'm sure he does. As you say, we've hardly had a word together lately. And what does he mean by talking to me about Mrs. Grundy ? It's that Sinclair woman ! I know she doesn't like me, and I saw them talking together the day he got his marching orders. You know, Vi," he added irritably, " you're very indiscreet at times, I've often told you. I bet he's told that Sinclair woman to keep him posted. I never liked you taking her ayah. I bet that was a put-up job."

" Don't be silly, Frank ! "

" Oh, I know the natives better than you ! It's a funny thing your ayah wanted to leave just when Mrs. Sinclair's ayah wanted to go to you."

" Vivienne, we must be going."

She turned and saw her husband standing close to them and wondered if he had overheard Oldham's remark. Hugh, however, gave

no sign that he had. He slipped his arm through hers, contented himself with nodding Oldham goodbye, and, helping his wife into the tonga, jumped in beside her.

He had intended to slip away unobserved but no such luck awaited him. Mrs. Sinclair rushed up for a final leave taking.

"We'll look after Vi for you," she said, "and report all her doings—so you'd better look out, my little lady!"

The word was soon passed round the club that Garfield was going and he found his tonga detained until he had shaken hands all round again. Then, rather embarrassed with all their good wishes, he told the tonga wallah to drive on. The lazy bullocks strained at the tonga bar, the wheels crunched on the newly laid gravel and, to the accompaniment of a rousing cheer, the tonga jogged its way down the club drive and on to the dimly lighted road.

CHAPTER XXVII

"THANK goodness *that* pow-wow's over!" Vivienne muttered the words to herself as she sat in front of the mirror.

The ayah was taking down her hair at the time, but for once the woman's deft fingers seemed clumsy, not only clumsy but tediously slow, and Vivienne was longing to be alone.

For some time she controlled her impatience, the while her mind reverted to the after-dinner conversation with Hugh.

"He just hit the nail on the head when he said our marriage was a mistake. A mistake?" She gave a little laugh. "It's a farce and a catastrophe! He hasn't a single idea in common with me. His idea of a wife is the out-of-date mid-Victorian Miss!"

His remark about "pleasures being all very well, but they were only the condiments of life," simply showed his narrow-mindedness. The emancipation of woman was nothing to him but a phrase. No wonder they hadn't hit it off!

"I'm glad I laughed when he said many young girls nowadays look on the church as a place only

to be resorted to in trouble, on the altar simply as a mascot which gives them a chance of reaping crops they haven't sown. . . . He was having a dig at me, I'm sure ! Well, if that's his opinion of me I'm glad I know it ! ”

With this latter thought she tossed her head disdainfully.

“ Ayah, you are clumsy to-night ! That's the second time you've half pulled my head off ! ”

“ Not ayah's fault, Memsahib. Memsahib moving her head too much. ”

“ Oh, go away ! I can't be bothered with you any longer ! ”

“ Ayah not done anything wrong, Memsahib. ”

Vivienne uttered another peevish command to be left alone, and, snatching the comb from the woman, continued the work herself.

Unused to the task, she soon found her arms aching as she tried to comb out the tangles in the long, thick mass, and she felt an additional sense of grievance against her husband.

Still busy with her thoughts, she did not realise the passing of time and had barely finished undressing when the soft pad-padding of her husband's slippers as he trod the concrete verandah caught her ear.

Hurriedly slipping into bed without turning down the light she had just time to cover herself with the bed-clothes when he entered and sat down on the side of the bed.

“ I'm afraid I've upset you, Vi ? ”

“ What makes you think that ? ”

"Well, you're usually in bed long before this, and when I saw your light I thought perhaps you were worried. You know, my dear girl, I wasn't lecturing you."

"No, Hugh, but you only see things from your point of view. You forget I'm young and have always had my freedom."

"I don't think I've forgotten it. I've not interfered with you in any way. It's only because I'm going that I ask you to be a little more discreet. There's a lot in what you say—that we're back numbers out here. But it isn't much to ask you to pay some attention to our conventions for the short time I'll be away. The bother is that there's nothing to occupy your mind."

"What are you driving at?"

"Well, Vi, in many ways we're strangers, and I'm sure if there were any prospect of our having a child we'd understand each other better. That's what's wrong, Vi, I'm sure."

Vivienne turned her head away with such a look of dread that for a moment Garfield was dumbfounded. If he had been dealing with any other woman than his wife he might have formed some idea of the cause of her obvious distress.

As a doctor he was used to putting leading questions with a delicacy which won the confidence of his patients, and in any other case he would long before this have made a short cut to the root of the trouble.

He thought the misunderstandings of the past few months were the result of a struggle for mastership between a man and a woman—a struggle which his experience had taught him always takes place in the first few months of married life. But that look of dread shed light on ideas which had lain dormant at the back of his mind.

He had made that commonest of all mistakes—of measuring his wife's love by his own, and though lately it had struck him that his love was of a deeper quality than hers, the thought that her love did not exist had never previously taken a concrete form.

Now a horrifying suspicion arrested him. Perhaps, after all, her love was dead and not dormant; and while he tried to unravel the conflict of emotions which overwhelmed him he suddenly heard words which he could hardly believe, words which staggered and numbed his senses. But even if the words and the voice in which they were uttered had not found their target in his heart, the look which accompanied them would have done. There was no mistaking the meaning of that look as the words escaped Vivienne's lips.

"A child, Hugh Garfield? Those days are over!"

Good God! What was she saying? That was the thought in his mind, but he was too aghast to give it expression. Then, as though the blow he had suffered was insufficient, more angry words poured from her lips.

"What have you done to deserve a child? . . . Nothing! You know it. Had you been fair with me I would have been more than a wife to you. I thought when I married you we'd be all in all to each other, but all you're concerned about is your work. You've treated me as you'd treat a patient. You've left me to my own thoughts, as though my rising aversion was a disease which had to run its course! And now, when it's too late, when you see the wreck you've made, you want me to become a mother because you think that's the speediest way of making me dependent on you. All, because you were not honest with me from the start."

"Vivienne, are you mad?"

"No, Hugh Garfield, I'm *not* mad! If you had told me you were a Eurasian I would have married you just the same."

"But I'm not a Eurasian."

"Isn't your family name really Gomez? Didn't you tell me that?"

"No, Vi."

"You did! And doesn't everyone here know that Gomez is a Goanese name? And aren't Goanese natives?"

"I said Gomeslez."

"Gomez or Gomeslez, it's all the same!"

"It's not, Vi. Gomez is Portuguese, and the Goanese in this country are only of Portuguese descent. But Gomeslez is Spanish, pure Spanish."

"Oh, what's the use of trying to persuade me

when I *know* ! I've never seen any of your people. Everyone in the Station says you're a Eurasian, and you don't even take the trouble to deny it. What else can I think ? But whether you're a Eurasian or not, you didn't tell me of the insults I'd have to put up with. If I'd known more about your family I might have snapped my fingers in their faces, but you've left me to fight it alone. You haven't been honest with me. You know how I felt over Mrs. Bell's black child. I wanted you to speak then——"

"My dear girl, this is the first time you've mentioned Mrs. Bell's child."

"You didn't know I'd visited Mrs. Bell ?"

"Oh yes, *she* told me."

"Well then, you know all about it. I gave you a chance to speak after seeing her, but instead of being open with me you just denied it again and said you weren't a Eurasian, as though that made up for your deceit !"

"I haven't deceived you, Vi. Will you listen to me for a moment."

"No, I won't—not till I've had my say ! You didn't deceive me when you went off for four days and never wrote me a letter ? You didn't deceive me when you sneaked back in the middle of the night and couldn't give me a straight answer to a straight question ? You tried to pass it off and spoke about having given someone a promise you couldn't break. If that isn't deceit, what is ? And now you want me to have a child. Have a child ! And live to hear people talking

about it as they talk about you ! No, *never* ! It's better to go our own ways. You've killed my love by your deceit, and I know you've never had any for me or you couldn't have treated me like this."

"Vivienne !" Hugh's anger now dominated him. "I'm not going to talk any more to you to-night, but there isn't a drop of Indian blood in my veins. And I think you've not been open with me. You're simply beside yourself because I've said I won't have Oldham coming here in my absence. *I've* been the one who's been fooled, not you, I can see it now ! I ought to have known that a leopard can't change its spots, and that that chap Oldham had some ulterior object in suddenly becoming my friend. You're behaving like this simply because I've forbidden him the house. I was warned about it once when you two were dancing together."

"Mrs. Sinclair, I suppose !" retorted Vivienne with a sneer. "The woman who poses as my friend !"

"No, it wasn't Mrs. Sinclair, and it doesn't matter much who it was. The only thing that matters is that I trusted you. That's where I went wrong. But your behaviour to-night, Vivienne, has opened my eyes. I've been a trusting fool. I wouldn't take you to Bombay because I didn't want you to incur any risks, but I'm not coming back to Ghurumpur now. I shall get a permanent transfer to Bombay and the first thing I'll do when I get there will be to get a bungalow,

and then you can choose whether you come to Bombay and give me my rights as a husband, or go Home ! ”

“ You needn’t wait to get a bungalow, Hugh Garfield. I’ve already made up my mind—I’m going Home ! ”

“ D’you mean that, Vi ? ” There was not only a tone of reproach in his voice but a ring of finality, and Vivienne for once found herself at a loss for a reply.

Hugh waited for a few minutes in silence, and, angry though he was, something inside him told him not to press for her answer. After all, he was leaving in the morning and he could write to her and explain his position better. For as he sat there he realised that he loved his wife and nothing could kill that love. He knew how he would miss her and imagined that after a lapse of time she would miss him.

Time had healed similar breaches in the lives of other married couples and, thinking it better to let time do its work, he rose and went into his own room to lie awake thinking of the mess that misunderstandings had wrought in their lives.

* * *

At half past four in the morning he entered his wife’s room again. The tonga, with his luggage, was waiting in the porch to take him to the station.

He found her sleeping and, bending over her, touched her lips for the last time and murmuring : “ Goodbye, Vi, dear heart,” he left the room as silently as he had entered.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FOR about ten days after Hugh's departure Vivienne did not go to the club. Shortly after he left she received a letter which made her ashamed of herself. As she perused it she saw the real Hugh Garfield, and she realised what her husband had so often told himself—that her love was dormant and not dead.

There were no extravagant protestations of his love, but it appeared to her all the more tangible and real on that account, and between the lines she read the confession of a man who knows his own limitations.

He traced step by step the progress of her petulance and his inability to cope with it, but there were no recriminations. It was a tale of misunderstanding on his part which had left him in such perplexity that he had kept his thoughts to himself. He ought to have known that his reticence in connection with his family was calculated to deceive, but he did not know it, and, though the words were not there, Vivienne could see that his love was so great that he would have treated with contempt any aspersions against her,

and she saw the reason for his failure. He had considered her love as simple and trusting as his own.

His failure—he made it quite clear that he regarded it in this light—to understand her mental attitude in connection with those insinuations of native blood, his failure to appreciate what it meant to her, and the consequences should she become a mother, had only struck him after his arrival in Bombay. The only thing in the letter, however, which made her apprehensive was his reference to house-hunting, and the suggestion that they should begin life afresh.

She was not sufficiently certain of her own feelings to welcome the suggestion of an immediate reconciliation, notwithstanding the fact that he promised to give a satisfactory explanation of that absence of his which had been the real point of contention between them. He hinted also that his father had not very long to live and that on his death he would be free to disclose the circumstances which had kept his tongue tied in the matter of his parentage.

“Because of all my perplexity, not to say unhappiness, Vivienne,” he continued, “I buried myself, as you know, deeper in my work and, as a result, I believe I have found a serum which will cure one of the most dreaded diseases of the tropics. Had the circumstances which brought about this discovery been happier I should have gloried in my success, but it gives me little satisfaction now. There is a bitterness in the thought

that the relief which my efforts have brought to the door of the stricken has been at the expense of everything I hold most dear."

As she read this portion of the letter a knowledge of her own failure stared her in the face, and the fortitude of the man who, in all his mental agony, had not allowed his domestic problems to come between him and the debt he owed to humanity, compelled an admiration which a few days earlier she would have thought impossible.

His failure! He had not failed; it was *she* who had failed. He had judged her moral courage by the high standard of his own. He had relied on her to overcome her difficulties as he had overcome his. There was no hint of this in the letter; these thoughts were only uppermost in her mind. It was because her standards were not his that the breach between them had widened, and Vivienne Garfield realised at last that the thing he set store by, the idol he worshipped, was a paltry thing when weighed in his scales.

The trust of the man, the simple honesty of his pure mind, his self abnegation—the result of life-long discipline—held up to her a mirror in which she saw herself as the odious thing she was. It was a mirror which showed her that, compared to his, her love had never existed.

Had the letter been less honest, less simple, less eloquent, all might have been well. But it cut so deep that the anguish of her self-loathing ate into her heart. She felt she had lost every shred of

self respect, and the knowledge sapped her moral courage.

Unwittingly he had administered a dose so strong that, in the language of medicine, it was its own antidote. No wonder she was not prepared to contemplate an immediate re-union!

It was her shame and self loathing which kept her indoors. She felt after reading that letter, for every word of it had cut deeply in her memory, that she could never meet Oldham face to face again, and she tried to force herself to write a letter telling him of the bitter shame their acts had brought her.

She made several attempts to do so, but each letter she began either said too much or too little. She could not bring herself to deal with him honestly and frankly.

The desire for self condemnation was there. She realised that to get out of the entanglement she would have to take all the blame, but when it came to writing her pen faltered from indecision, and she found it accusing him.

And because she feared the man and did not like to hold herself up to his contempt the letter was never written, and, as the days passed, the desire to send it lost its urge. She waited day after day for something to turn up and, like all procrastinators, she procrastinated too long, and the time came when Oldham, who was chafing at her continued absence, forced himself to pay her a visit.

After Garfield's departure his feelings had been

very different from hers, very different from what he had expected they would be. He had no doubt that Vivienne would, sooner or later, meet him at the club. The apprehension he had felt when he realised that Garfield's suspicion would result in his having a straight talk with Vivienne quickly disappeared. He felt safe in the belief that her affection was of a deeper quality than his own, and he had no doubt that, after the lapse of a day or two, Vivienne, hurling discretion to the wind, would literally throw herself at his feet. He was not sure that he desired that; it did not appeal to his hunting instincts.

Stolen kisses were Oldham's food. Free kisses without restraint might entail a responsibility, and Frank Oldham was not prepared to shoulder responsibility.

Her absence from the club for the first day or two was therefore rather a relief to him than otherwise, but as day succeeded day he became chagrined at her absence. What, he asked himself, if her husband had triumphed after all? And finally a remark of Mrs. Sinclair stirred his desires. . . .

"We're going to lose our Doctor, Mr. Oldham."

"I thought we'd already lost him?"

"Oh, I mean permanently. My husband heard from Major Garfield this morning. His application to be permanently transferred to Bombay has been agreed to. I went round and saw Mrs. Garfield this morning and I think she's looking forward to the change."

Mrs. Sinclair knew that this was not quite true, but she could not deny herself the satisfaction of giving Oldham a thrust.

It was then that Oldham's good resolutions vanished. He had made up his mind not to seek out Vivienne until she sought him, but the thought that she might any day take her departure stirred him to action. He had expected her to absent herself from the club for a day or two but, as her absence continued without his receiving a word from her, his resentment had risen until he persuaded himself that not until she came to him on bended knee would he have anything more to do with her. And he had recited to himself a short speech of cutting sarcasm which, in his self conceit, he had determined to make.

But as he heard Mrs. Sinclair's words anxiety preyed on his mind. What if she had really changed? The thought brought him a mental depression almost unbearable. Suddenly he realised how much he had missed her and what her presence meant to him.

For a few minutes he sat there listening to Mrs. Sinclair's recitation of the success which had attended Major Garfield's research work, and the wonderful serum he had discovered. As he listened the image of Vivienne stood before him. It was not the Vivienne he had held in his arms but the far removed wife of a world famous man, and he recalled all the incidents of their association. The touch of her small dainty hands, the softness of her lips, the caressing look which now and again

crept into her eyes, the words they had spoken and the promises they had made. His hunting instincts were again stirred and he persuaded himself that he not only loved the woman, but could not live without her.

It was in this frame of mind that he presently left the chabutra and, after partaking of a stiff whiskey and soda at the bar, ordered his trap and, driving off to the Garfield's bungalow, asked to see Mrs. Garfield and received the message that she would be with him in a few minutes.

He took a seat by the table on the verandah, chafing at the delay.

CHAPTER XXIX

FROM time to time Oldham heard footsteps in Vivienne's bedroom. They seemed to fascinate him and whisper words in his ear. The bedroom seemed a hallowed place, and it maddened him to think that it belonged to a man who did not appreciate its occupant, who did not know what love is, and who was that contemptible of all men, in Oldham's eyes, a Eurasian.

The pure white skin of Vivienne Garfield seemed to be despoiled at the thought, and Oldham made up his mind that he would not let things remain as they were. It was over ten days since she had visited the club, and he felt convinced that Garfield had bullied her into subjection. The thought made him boil with anger and, mesmerised by an overwhelming desire, he rose suddenly from the chair and, tip-toeing to the doorway, lifted the purdah and peeped in.

The added light which the raised purdah admitted attracted Vivienne's attention and, turning round, their eyes met.

Taken so suddenly unawares Vivienne could

not suppress that look of welcome which leapt to her eyes. As the days had passed without a word from Oldham she imagined that he had begun to loathe her as much as she loathed herself, and had come to the conclusion that he, too, had found her out for the weak thing she was. But instead of reproach she saw the yearning in his eyes and all her good resolutions melted.

She felt the hypnotic power of the man in whose hands she was as clay. She forgot she was not fully dressed ; she forgot she was alone in her bedroom and her hands went out to him as her lips emitted a low crooning sound. He stepped into the room and took her in his arms.

For a moment or two they clung to each other in the joy of their meeting until she realised where they were and, with that realisation, came the knowledge of the weakness of her moral character ; and the pent-up misery of her fortnight's loneliness found expression. Tears rolled down her cheeks, tears which Oldham took for the expression of her love, but which she knew were tears for one whose honour was in her keeping.

"Go ! Leave me !" she cried despairingly. "Leave me before it's too late !"

But Oldham did not heed that frenzied appeal. He was holding this woman in his arms, holding her for the first time without fear of consequences, and the blood surging through his veins, carried with it his sense of honour.

Suddenly the curtain was raised again, and the ayah's presence called him to his senses.

“Memsahib have her bath now?”

The woman spoke the words as though there was nothing unusual in the scene she witnessed, and the last shred of self-respect was torn from Vivienne Garfield.

She felt like a criminal in the presence of a judge, but the innate pluck of woman came to her rescue. She had passed the Rubicon in spirit if not in deed, and she knew there was no going back and, because of that knowledge, she felt no shame.

Oldham, because men have not the same effrontery as women in such situations, cursed his luck between his teeth. He had sold his honour for a kiss! And he was dimly conscious that he had perhaps burnt his boats behind him.

The ayah disappeared into the bathroom and shut the door.

“Frank, you’d better wait on the verandah for a few minutes. I’ll be with you presently.”

* * *

As Oldham re-seated himself in a chair on the verandah, catching now and again the patter of Vivienne’s feet as she walked about her room, he cursed his luck more vehemently than ever. The murmur of conversation between Vivienne and her ayah seemed interminable, and made him so impatient that the minutes seemed like hours.

He wondered what they were talking about and strained his ears to catch the words, but failed. He wondered what all that walking about meant. He had an idea that women dressed in front of

the looking glass and stayed there until their toilet was complete.

The continual opening and shutting of wardrobe doors seemed to him endless and objectless. He imagined that while a woman was in her bath the ayah placed her clothes on the bed or on one of the chairs ready for her, as his bearer dealt with his clothes. He did not know that every garment taken from the wardrobe was inspected to see that the dhobie* had not torn the lace in the washing. Or that a woman's fancy in her dress was liable to change at any minute according to the impression she wished to create.

Now that his blood was cool, and the consequences of his rash act stared him in the face, depression brought on a re-action which accentuated his impatience.

In the uncertainty of how she would meet him and what she would say he felt his vitality ebbing away; the thought that things could never be the same appalled him.

The footsteps of the butler added to the discomfort he was beginning to experience; he had seen the ayah leave for a few minutes when Vivienne was in her bath, and he had no doubt that his impropriety was now known to all the servants.

“Will the Sahib have a peg?”

Oldham imagined he saw a smirk on the man's face—a smirk which did not exist, for the ayah knew that in this matter she must keep her own

* Washer-man.

counsel, and, just when he had exhausted every vestige of his patience, Vivienne lifted the purdah and came towards him.

"I'm glad we've taken this step at last, Frank! It had to be."

Coward that Oldham was, he shrank from the sense of guilt which her words produced.

"Are you?" he muttered unenthusiastically.

"Yes, and relieved. We must leave the Station now."

The word "we" had a prophetic ring. He would have much preferred her to demand an explanation of his conduct or to revile him for his rash act. He would have much preferred her to upbraid, and then he could have explained the motive which impelled him. An explanation would give him an opportunity to calm her anxiety and, putting their heads together, they could discuss what was the wisest course in the circumstances.

The idea that there was only one thing to do—for both of them to leave the Station—made more concrete the difficulties he had to face. He had very little money; he was not in a position to marry. And there she was, clearly and definitely, proposing an elopement.

"I don't think we ought to do anything rash, Vi," he said, trying to speak unconcernedly.

"Do anything rash, Frank?" There was a look of reproach in her eyes, and the doubt she had always had about him gathered strength, the doubt as to the worth of his love. How ludicrous

his words seemed ! Didn't he realise what he had done ?

"Rash, Frank ?" she repeated. "Is there anything rash in running away from the mess we've both made ? *You* know as well as I do how servants talk. Mrs. Sinclair will know it before another day passes, and in a week it will be the talk of the Station. I couldn't face it, could you ?"

"I think we might stop her tongue with a little backsheesh," he said, avoiding a direct answer to her question. "At any rate, I think it's worth trying. After all, we haven't done anything *really* wrong, and now we both know that our platonic friendship is a myth we can keep a firmer hold on ourselves in future."

"Done nothing wrong, Frank ? What kind of love is yours that you talk like that ?"

"Well, we haven't done anything really wrong, have we, Vi ?"

"How can you speak like that ! What about my husband ? What sort of a name will he have in the Station ? What about the trust he gave to you and to me ? It's no use saying we can bribe ayah. You're always saying they take the money and talk just the same."

"Yes, but if you left it to me I think I could put the fear of God into her."

"And how long would that keep her tongue quiet ? Not long, you know. The other servants would worm it out sooner or later. You've said yourself that if they possess a secret they put on

such an air of importance that everybody knows they've got one."

"But I think we might try it, Vi, for a bit—just till we've had time to think things out a little."

"There's nothing to think out, you know there isn't. There's only one thing that can justify what we've done and that's our love."

She knew as she spoke that her love for Oldham was a myth, that the attraction between them was physical, but she knew it was an attraction which, as far as she was concerned, she could not resist.

Oldham searched his mind for a reply; he knew what reply to give, for he was under no misapprehension as to the nature of their affection, but he felt he could not tell the distraught woman that it was passion and not love which had drawn them together, and as the silence continued she realised his cowardice.

"You've nothing to say?" she said. There was the slightest suspicion of a taunt in her voice. "If your love is not like mine why did you bother with me? Why did you teach me to love you? Are all your embraces, all your promises, to mean nothing? Just because we've found out the fallacy of our platonic friendship?"

"No, Vi. I'm only asking for a little time to think things over."

"And I say there's no time—unless you want to shame me before the world. Haven't you often told me you wished Hugh would break his

neck so that you could marry me ? And why should we wish for his death when you can have me without it ! He hasn't wronged us, it's we who've wronged him. If it's *money* which makes you hesitate, I can help you. I have a little of my own, and with it you and I could start life afresh. We won't be the first couple to elope, and Hugh won't be the first man to divorce a wife, and for my sake I know he'll do it. And then we can go to some other country and bury it all. Oh, can't you see that there is nothing else to be done ? ”

And because of the fascination which Oldham exercised, a fascination which obliterated her real love, she pleaded with him and, in the end, prevailed.

CHAPTER XXX

OLDHAM stayed for dinner. The meal, partaken under the eyes of what they both considered were watchful, suspicious servants, created a depression which stripped the last shred of glamour from their false romance.

Now that the freedom, for which they had so often sighed and wished, was theirs, the spirit of zest, which up till now had carried them blindly on their clandestine way, was killed by nervousness for the future and remorse for past acts.

The sport had departed from the game with the realisation that it was a game no longer. Even the parting kiss which he gave when, their plans fully discussed and arranged, he left the bungalow, was lacking both salt and spice.

Vivienne stood and watched the departing trap with every possible misgiving in her heart and after a while turned and, seating herself at the writing table, picked up a pen intending to write her husband a last letter. But her thoughts for a time were too complex and she sat, with blurred vision, gazing abstractedly at the pen which was soon to write its fateful message.

In those moments she realised that she had obtained the shadow and not the substance of love. Womanlike, she wanted someone to lean on and Frank Oldham had shown the weakness of his character in almost every word he had spoken.

He had laid stress on every difficulty, likely or unlikely to arise. And Vivienne Garfield was now convinced that she had exchanged the safe security of one man's strength for the weakness of a vacillator.

For a long while she continued to gaze at the blank sheet of paper in front of her, when suddenly her eyes cleared and her pen began to move as though under the influence of a hidden power.

As the pen raced through line after line it expressed a relief that the time had come when she could be open and frank. To her the decision to elope appeared like a sacrifice to the man who at least had a claim on her honesty and, as she penned the lines, she felt Hugh would understand the sacrifice she was making. He would be grieved and hurt and wounded, but she had no doubt that in time he would see it as she saw it. Her love was not worthy of him ; his pride would help him to bear the blow, because the emotions which had driven her into Oldham's arms were emotions which showed the cloven hoof of passion.

In this hour of self-condemnation she saw herself as she was—a woman who could never hold any man's love because, in her selfishness, she desired all and could give away nothing of value.

All this she made clear and when she finished the letter she felt a load had been lifted from her mind. She had confessed her own shortcomings, and the man who loved her would see her as she really was, and not as she had for so long pretended to be.

But a few days later, when Hugh Garfield read the letter, he failed, in his wounded pride, to grasp that the picture it presented was a false one. It represented Vivienne, not as she really was, but garbed in the exaggerated cloak of her deep shame.

* * *

The next twenty-four hours dragged out their tedious, interminable minutes; but at last tiffin was over, and Vivienne retired to rest and dismissed her ayah. As soon as the woman had departed she packed the few things she intended to take with her, and put the two suitcases back in their usual place at the bottom of one of the hanging wardrobes.

She was determined that none of the servants should know anything about their plans, and had an idea that no one had any inkling that she was going to run away.

She did not know that, while she and Oldham elaborated their arrangements, there were two quick ears, behind a neighbouring purdah, which had absorbed every detail, nor did she notice that her ayah who brought in her cup of tea when the siesta hours were over looked tired and heavy-eyed for want of sleep; Vivienne was too anxious

about her own affairs, and, while she bathed and dressed, her mind alternately dwelt on the effect her letter would produce and the arrangements she and Oldham had made for their departure.

Oldham's tonga was to pass the gate of their bungalow at midnight when all the servants would be indoors and the Station asleep, and when she heard the jingle of the tonga bells she was to carry her suitcases herself and proceed down the main road until the tonga overtook her. It would take her to Bohatti where another tonga would be waiting as a relay to take her on to Mohut, some twenty-four miles by road from Ghurumpur.

The Garfields had once stayed at Bohatti as guests of Oldham. It was an imposing bungalow, built at the time when planters ruled and lived like lords in their domains, drawing such princely commissions from the sale of indigo that every native believed that, in some mysterious way, the English extracted gold from it.

At Mohut, Oldham, who would travel on horseback, was to join her about half an hour before the mail train was due to arrive.

Vivienne had protested against this lonely journey, but Oldham was adamant. If, as he explained, the tonga were to arrive at Mohut in time to catch the mail, it would have to travel as light as possible. It could not leave Ghurumpur much before twelve if their movements were to be kept secret and the bullocks would have to be driven all out to arrive at Mohut in time. His additional weight, he pointed out, might mean

the difference between catching and missing the train.

As the afternoon advanced she thought less about the effect that her letter would produce on her husband and more about the elopement. If it had not been for the necessity of keeping up appearances she would have dispensed with dinner that night. She had an uncomfortable feeling that the servants were watching her more closely than usual and, to disarm the suspicion which she now felt sure they entertained, she forced herself to prolong the meal, and in spite of the dreary dragging of time she stayed up a little later than usual.

Interminable as the minutes seemed, however, time passed, and she was just on the point of retiring when it struck her that it would be as well to set her watch by the clock in her husband's consulting room. Her watch had been rather erratic of late. It would never do for her to miss the tonga and as the night was windy and cloudy, foreshadowing one of those cold weather storms which now and again put in an appearance, she was apprehensive lest the jingle of the tonga bells would not reach her ear, and she had, in consequence, made up her mind to be waiting on the road before the fixed hour.

She held up the hurricane lantern, noted the time, and was thankful for her precaution. She had never known her watch to lose so much ; it was a quarter to eleven when she thought it had just gone ten ! No wonder her ayah, sitting at

the end of the verandah awaiting her call, had given way to undisguised yawns and, hastily summoning her, Vivienne disrobed, got into bed and waited until all sounds from the servants' quarters ceased.

Then she rose, changed into a travelling dress and looked at her watch. It was ten minutes to twelve.

Carrying a suitcase in each hand she tiptoed out of the room, though there was no need for such precaution, crossed the gravel drive and, walking along on the edge of the grass, passed through the gate and, turning to the left, proceeded along the road.

She walked on for about five minutes, out of breath with hurrying, when the jingle of a tonga bell caught her ear. The high wind almost drowned the sound and she was glad she had taken the precaution of being before time. Oldham had laid stress on not keeping the tonga walla waiting in case some suspicious native policeman might subject her to interrogation.

It began to rain as the tonga approached, its sidelights winking as it jogged towards her. She felt nervous; the winking lights seemed to be mocking her.

She gave a sigh of relief as she took her seat; the tonga walla urged the bullocks into a trot, and she looked around to make sure her departure was unobserved. Not a soul was in sight either up or down the road.

Then her gaze fell on the luggage which Old-

ham had sent, and the sight provided food for reflection. He had limited her to two small handbags, persuading her that she could replace her wardrobe in Bombay but, judging by the size and number of his bags, it looked as though he were taking all his personal belongings and a rather sad, ironical smile curled her lips at the thought that she was running away with a man as selfish as herself.

Tired for want of sleep, for Vivienne had slept very little the night before, the swaying of the tonga, the jingling of the bells, had a soporific effect, and for two hours or so she dozed fitfully, taking no account of time or distance, when suddenly she was aroused to full consciousness. The tonga had stopped in front of a large white building and a hurricane lantern was flashed in her face.

"Garfield Memsahib?" The voice came from the bearer of the lantern. The English was perfect.

"Yes, I am Garfield Memsahib."

"Oldham Sahib has arranged to meet you here. We are expecting him shortly. Will Memsahib be pleased to come in and wait?"

"Where's the other tonga?"

"Not here yet, Memsahib."

Dumbfounded at the thought that a hitch of some sort had occurred and feeling somewhat dazed by her sudden awakening, she stepped down from the tonga with an air of bewilderment.

"The tonga not ready?" she said to herself.

Had his plans miscarried? Then she remembered the rain and the reluctance of native drivers to turn out on a stormy night. However, there was nothing else to do but await events. He would be there shortly, that would be one good thing. Perhaps at the last moment he had made up his mind to travel with her for the rest of the journey, and she felt the want of a little moral support.

Then a sickening fear overcame her. Had he changed his mind as well as his plans? Had the idea of taking time to think it over come to him again? She was filled with alarm at the thought.

The ayah had assured her that she had posted the letter to Hugh and she had little doubt that, within forty-eight hours, he would be back in Ghurumpur endeavouring to trace her.

She had regretted the hasty despatch of that letter more than once, and now with the thought that it had passed beyond recall she felt chafed and irritated at the delay. Something had happened, she felt sure.

"Would Memsahib please to come this way?"

For a moment Vivienne stood hesitating in the drizzling rain.

"Memsahib get wet," the man hinted gently. "Oldham Sahib be here soon."

Without waiting for her reply he turned and, leading the way up the steps, passed through the main entrance of the building, and Vivienne found herself ushered into a room dimly lighted

by a large hanging chirag, the three smoking wicks of which hardly served to lift the gloom.

"Mrs. Garfield, I presume?"

The voice sounded familiar but the deep gloom rendered recognition difficult. The tall figure of the man who addressed her made a hurried movement which might, or might not, have been intended for a salaam.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Garfield. I understand I'm to meet Mr. Oldham here."

"If my servant has told you that I am afraid he has been drawing on his imagination for his facts. I am the Rajah of Kohajulia and I am no servant of Mr. Oldham that I know his movements."

"Then I'm not to meet him here?" Vivienne said falteringly.

"You will never meet Mr. Oldham here. He is a man whose shadow I would not permit to cross my threshold."

"Then there's some mistake," she said sharply.

"I'm afraid, Mrs. Garfield, the mistake, if there be any mistake, is not mine. Your tonga walla must have taken the wrong road. It is very stupid of the fellow but it is too late for me to make any enquiries now and, with your permission, I suggest that one of my Rani's serving maids should show you to your room."

"To *my room*? What do you mean?" she said in a quiet voice, her mind clouded by perplexity and an ill-defined fear.

"Yes, your room, Mrs. Garfield. You see, I

am always prepared for eventualities. I happened to know you were leaving the Station this evening, and knowing the stupidity of these tonga wallas, may I say that your arrival is not altogether unexpected. Mr. Oldham's tonga, I believe, was taken to the police thana* for travelling without lights, and I am afraid that my tonga, with some empty traps that I used when I was in England and which I am particularly fond of for old associations' sake, happened to pass you on the road. I had an idea that you might hail it and, as I owe your husband a very great debt of gratitude and, Mrs. Garfield, as his honour is *my* honour," the flippant note which the Rajah had hitherto adopted was replaced by cold, cutting sarcasm, "my tonga walla had no alternative but to bring you here."

"I don't understand! What's the meaning of all this?" she stammered.

The Rajah, as she stammered out those words, had emerged from the shadow in which he was sitting and, standing where the dim light fell full upon him, she felt the penetrating eyes, set wide apart in his cruel but handsome face, pitilessly searching hers, as though he were reading the thoughts which passed through her bewildered mind. One fantastic idea after another occurred to her, only to be rejected. She could find no key to the situation. What did the Rajah mean by the words: "His honour is *my* honour"? Was he capable of reading every secret she possessed?

* Police Station

Suddenly she saw a different expression on his face. There was no mistaking the admiration his look expressed, but his voice still retained a contemptuous ring.

"I do not blame Mr. Oldham. You are very—I was going to say pretty, Mrs. Garfield, but it is too inadequate a word. Shall I say *beautiful*?" There was a taunting sneer in the insinuating, caressing way he rolled out the word "beautiful" which spurred her to indignation.

"I think my looks are my own concern!"

"Only your own concern, Mrs. Garfield?" He waited for her reply, and she felt she was being trapped. "Not your husband's, huh?"

The Rajah drew a step nearer and, standing directly under the chirag the features of his face disappeared in the dark shadow which the lamp cast.

Vivienne Garfield mistook the meaning of that advance and the inflection in his voice, and fear gave her courage.

"I don't know what you mean by inducing me to enter your house under the plea that I was to meet my friend here."

"Your friend, Mrs. Garfield? Was it your friend you came to see? I should have thought the term lover more correct."

"Will you call my tonga and let me go!" she demanded desperately. She wondered why she asked for her freedom; why she did not leave the man who was taunting her without asking per-

mission, but she felt her will was paralyzed as she stood there waiting anxiously for his reply.

Oh, how she wished she had never suggested this madcap elopement ! The shame of being spoken to as though she were an unprincipled wanton made her cheeks burn, the more so as she felt that it was in a way justified.

For some moments the silence continued and then the Rajah spoke again.

"I am afraid that is impossible. The bullocks are tired. They have come a long distance. Besides, I am afraid you do not realise your position. I must command you to go to your room. I have been more than frank with you, Mrs. Garfield ; I have already told you that *your husband's honour is my honour*, but if that is not sufficient, let me tell you that we Indians, whom you Englishwomen despise, have a greater sense of what is due to a husband than you have. Let me tell you that every act of any moment which you have committed, and every word of any consequence which you have uttered, have been known to me for many weeks past. Perhaps you will now understand why you find yourself a prisoner in my house. To-morrow you will give us your explanation."

"A prisoner ! . . . An explanation ? It's you who will have to make explanations to the Deputy Commissioner when he hears of this !"

"The Deputy Commissioner will never hear of it, Mrs. Garfield. You yourself, at any rate, will be spared that ordeal ! And those who have

been instrumental in kidnapping you will be too anxious about their own safety to let their tongues wag. But is not the hour somewhat late ? As you have already said, there must be explanations but this is not a fitting time. Will you go to your room ? ”

She made a hurried movement towards the door and, lifting the purdah, saw three stalwart-looking women waiting outside. Her confidence shrivelled.

“ They are there, Mrs. Garfield, to show you to your room.” He waved his hand as a sign of dismissal and Vivienne, feeling like a fly in a web, obeyed the command and, escorted by the serving maids, went to the room that had been prepared for her reception.

CHAPTER XXXI

VIVIENNE, tormented by her thoughts, passed a sleepless night. When the women retired and she found herself alone, she tiptoed to the door with the intention of locking it, only to find it devoid of fastenings.

The discovery made her apprehensive, but another shock was in store. Pulling aside the purdah, with the intention of ascertaining if she were located in an unoccupied part of the Palace, she looked straight into the eyes of a woman who was obviously keeping her under observation.

The cumulative effect of these disconcerting discoveries left her in a state of abject fear, and she lay awake, tossing and turning, on the hard native bed, expecting every minute to see the Rajah enter. It was with the utmost relief that she welcomed the dawn.

Thereafter time passed very slowly. She was served with chota hazri,* and the woman who waited on her enquired after her wants.

"She had orders to wait on Memsahib," she told Vivienne. "It was the Maharajah Bahadur's

* A light breakfast

wish that she should be made as comfortable as possible," and the woman appeared so friendly that Vivienne put a leading question with a view to obtaining some idea of the Rajah's intentions, but the reply she received was discouraging. . . .

"I am only a humble servant of the Maharajah Bahadur. What do I know?"

After this remark time dragged more heavily, for Vivienne never ventured to speak to the woman again, and it was with something like relief that she received a summons to present herself in the throne room. Anything, she felt, was preferable to uncertainty. And though exhausted from want of sleep, her spirits rose at the thought that the veil of uncertainty was about to be lifted.

Following her escort down the corridor she descended the central staircase, leading to the entrance hall, and was directed towards an opening on her left.

A solitary body servant, armed with a gruesome looking native spear, lowered its point to the ground as she approached.

Simultaneously, with the clatter of the weapon on the hard floor, the purdah was drawn aside and Vivienne passed through into the throne room.

The dais at the far end was already occupied by a group of officials, some seated, others standing, and Vivienne noticed their somewhat gorgeous but grotesque uniforms.

The gudda, surmounted by a canopy of scarlet

and gold, and backed by a cunningly worked tapestry representing Hunnymon, the elephant-trunked monkey-god, was empty, as was the auditorium itself except for Vivienne's presence.

The room was lit by seven high, rather narrow, windows, which were surmounted by curiously curved arches. The groined roof was inlaid with mosaics and the walls were covered with crude coloured frescoes framed in heavy, plastered mouldings which gave the room an extremely bizarre, Eastern appearance.

Some of the paintings were almost obscene, for nothing changed in the Rajah's throne room, and the pictures were the replicas of those which had been painted on the panels hundreds of years ago when the palace was originally built.

Unlike the hall, the floor was of concrete, but the surface was plastered smooth, and so polished and tooled that it had the appearance of a solid slab of white marble ; the result of an art long since dead in Hindustan.

With the exception of the gudda and some half dozen long, low cushioned stools on the dais, there was no furniture in the room and Vivienne stood gazing nervously around, wondering where she was expected to sit.

For a few moments after her entry a hushed silence fell on the assembled officials. It was, however, short-lived, and presently the buzz of conversation was renewed with increased vigour. Some of those present were chewing pan but it did not seem to hinder their talk ; only they spoke

spasmodically, with the red juice from the betel nut and pan leaves oozing from their mouths.

But when the conversation was renewed one and all introduced a truculent, insulting ring into their voices, and Vivienne's cheeks burned as she realised that their gestures and nods in her direction reflected remarks of a coarse and disparaging nature.

The sound of a clanking spear on the marble hall echoed faintly through the room, and the old Diwan, who was sitting on the right of the gudda, rose, and in a feeble voice gave a command.

"Stand up! His Highness, the Maharajah Bahadur."

All who were sitting immediately rose to their feet, and order and reverence reigned where a few moments before ribald jests and disorder had prevailed.

A moment later the Rajah entered and placing his sandals at the side of the doorway, walked barefooted to the dais, and it was then Vivienne noticed for the first time that she was the only one present who wore shoes.

The Rajah acknowledged the deep obeisance which his officials made, and then, seating himself on the gudda, he turned in Vivienne's direction and began to speak.

"Mrs. Garfield." The Rajah uttered the name slowly and deliberately. "I am sorry that the rules of our court do not permit of an accused woman sitting in our presence, and for this reason

I can only offer you an apology for my failure to provide you with a chair."

"An accused woman." As Vivienne's mind fastened on the words she gave an amused laugh; the jibes which the officials had indulged in had stirred her defiance. The exact meaning of their conversation she had not understood, but the purport of it had been unmistakable. Every vestige of fear had left her.

She felt that however ill-advised and wrong her actions had been, they did not provide a sufficient excuse for the indignity thrust upon her. The thing which intrigued her was the nature of the accusation the Rajah had to make. It was impossible to think that he had arrogated to himself the right to try her for her intended elopement. That had nothing whatever to do with him. She could only think that she was about to be tried on some *trumped-up* charge which would give the Rajah a plausible excuse for detaining her in the Palace.

She had no doubt that his calm, dispassionate demeanour was only a cloak to his real feelings. She had not forgotten the look of admiration he had given her the previous night. She felt sure a native did not kidnap a European woman for any reason but one. He might justify himself in front of his officials, but she would die rather than surrender herself to him, and she waited, with a supercilious, tantalising smile on her lips, for him to proceed.

"Mrs. Garfield, the crime which we accuse

you of is adultery. Do you plead guilty ? ” He paused for a moment, then, noticing her demeanour, he continued as though her answer was quite immaterial. “ I see you do not care to deny it. You naturally rely on the fact that we, who charge you, must first of all prove the charge. That is good. I suppose your denial and protestations will come later, and we will then remember your reluctance to plead your innocence.”

The look which accompanied these sarcastic words disillusioned Vivienne Garfield. Her anxiety and fear returned, and the knowledge of her innocence did not dispel her feeling of shame. She was firmly convinced that, in the Rajah's eyes, she was an adulteress, and in her heart she knew she was guilty in spirit if not in act.

But what impressed her most of all was the conviction that this mock trial, for she still believed it to be a mock trial, had not been instituted to serve the Rajah's own ends.

No one could look at her as he was looking and have ulterior motives. Her womanly intuition shrieked it in her brain. The sense of guilt for an act, though not committed, she had contemplated, unnerved her, and she stood tongue-tied under her conflicting emotions.

“ For an adulteress, Mrs. Garfield, we Indians have no compassion, and no mercy. When you have heard what your own ayah has to say I think you will be glad you did not deny your guilt. She will tell us in your presence that Mr. Oldham

has been your lover for some considerable time. That you have given him favours which no married woman has the right to give. That the day before you arrived here you received your lover in your bedroom at a time when you thought all your domestic servants were having their siesta. She will tell us, also, that she heard all the arrangements you made with him for your elopement. And I say that, had I not been made acquainted with your intentions, you would long before this have joined the partner of your crime."

Vivienne made an attempt to interrupt but the Rajah held up his hand commandingly and the gesture silenced her.

"Your ayah, who is one of my people, advanced the clock in your bungalow and instead of meeting Mr. Oldham's tonga you met mine, and, because Major Garfield is my friend, the driver had orders to bring you here."

"You will have a fair trial, Mrs. Garfield. You have only to convince me of your innocence and you will be allowed to go. But if you fail to convince me, then the only sentence I can pass on you is the sentence of death. Have you anything to say now?"

Poor Vivienne had nothing to say. The fact that her ayah had been a spy on her stunned her, and thought after thought flashed through her mind so quickly that she was unable to retain a single one.

"You may wonder why you find yourself here, and by what right I claim to try the wife of Major

Garfield ? I try you by the right which every honest man has, and by the debt of gratitude we all owe to your husband.

“ My people and their welfare are more to me than my throne, and your husband’s devotion to duty has given back to me lives which are as precious as my own. There is not a servant in the State who has ever called on Major Garfield in vain. I would be unworthy of the trust my people repose in me if his honour were no concern of mine. I have sworn to protect him and his as I would protect my own. Do you question my right now ? ”

“ I have never questioned it,” she faltered, moved by his impassioned words.

“ Then we will summon our principal witness.”

At a sign from the Rajah a woman entered, and Vivienne’s eyes searched those of her late ayah. One look was enough ; she was convinced of the hopelessness of her cause.

The woman had not the subservient bearing of the honeyed-speaking ayah Vivienne had known. She was a transformed being.

As though schooled to the part, she made a deep salaam to the gudda, bowing her head until it touched the ground, but she made no obeisance to Vivienne, and then, standing in a provocative attitude, she began speaking.

“ Maharajah Bahadur, gurrib pawah, Garfield Memsahib is a very wicked woman.” She spoke the words with the pride of a principal actor.

“Memsahib and Oldham Sahib love each other too much. She kiss him whenever——”

Vivienne waited to hear no more. She could not stand there in that auditorium facing her stern judge and listen to a long recitation of her compromising acts.

She had not committed adultery, but it appeared to her that there were worse things than adultery. To stand and listen like an outcast to accusations brought by a woman who had answered to her beck and call was more than she could stand; and in that moment she found her courage, found her dignity and, what was more, she found the spirit of the ruling race.

“Who are you,” she interrupted, addressing the Rajah with defiant anger, “to allow that woman to say such things! . . . That woman has eaten my husband’s salt,” she almost hissed out the words, “and at the same time was eating yours! And because you could pay her more, because you have more power than we have, will she not say what you want her to say? And put meaning into my acts and words to meet with your desire? Would she not swear to anything you wished? Would she not swear away my honour and my husband’s also at a nod from you? I want no more of this evidence! Do with me what you like but for my husband’s sake, if not for mine, spare me the insults of your hirelings. The day will come when you will regret you listened to the accusations of an evil-minded woman. What right have you to hold an enquiry

into my acts ! What your object is I don't know, but as far as I'm concerned I care nothing for your mock trial. My doings are no concern of yours and, whether I'm guilty or not, do you think my husband will allow *you* to judge me ?" She shook her head provocatively, and paused, astonished at herself.

It was quite clear to her that the Rajah knew every detail, of any consequence, connected with her association with Oldham. That knowledge robbed further exposure of its sting, and her husband's last letter rang like a song in her brain. She knew he would realise when she told him everything, that her weakness was not inherent, but the result of her mawkish, sentimental upbringing. That much of the blame rested with her parents who considered all punishment degrading, and who trusted to the sense of honour of her immature mind.

She had done nothing really wrong, she could at least tell Hugh that, and it was significant of her changed mental outlook that not one thought for Oldham lurked in her mind.

Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted, for the Rajah was speaking again. After her outburst he had paused a moment, while the expression of anger and contempt on his face deepened.

"Then I suppose, Mrs. Garfield, you will not say that the charge against you is a lie, huh ? You shirk the ordeal of listening to the truth."

"Yes, it *is* a . . . lie." Vivienne was hardly steady on the last word. She felt as though the

look of the Rajah was no abstract thing, but something tangible and real. It seemed to grip her brain, until she felt as though it did not belong to her but to another person—an alien being whose actions she could not control.

She shrank from the hypnotic gaze, trying to compel her eyes to look down, only to discover that they were incapable of moving and were held fast in the gaze of eyes which seemed to draw nearer to her.

Unknown to himself, the depth of his revulsion, the anger with which he regarded, what he considered, a hypocritical outburst, had given the Rajah, as far as this woman was concerned, a power which made her the medium of his thoughts.

Her tongue was stilled and he saw, in her helpless, vacant expression, what he considered were the unmistakable signs of the guilt of an abnormal, pleasure-loving wanton.

“Then no matter how painful it may be, you will have to listen to the evidence of servants who have eaten your salt and mine, and I think you will agree with me that the evidence of such servants is likely to be less tainted than if they had only eaten mine. They owe you the truth, just as they owe it to me, and that woman, whom you despise, has taken a vow which she dare not prostitute. In the Temple of our Goddess she has sworn on the sacred bull that she and hers may suffer the torments of the damned if she lies in my presence.”

Turning to the now trembling ayah he reminded her of her sacred obligations and bade her proceed.

Vivienne did not hear the evidence. She was only aware of the thoughts and emotions passing through the Rajah's mind. She did not hear the evidence of the other servants, nor was she aware of their presence, or that they were gradually weaving a web which left no loophole for a defence. And when their statements were finished the Rajah knew she would admit her guilt.

"Now, Mrs. Garfield, what have you to say? Do these servants of yours—these people of mine—tell the truth? Or do they lie?"

"They tell the truth" That alien being, beside and yet inside her, uttered the words, not her own tongue.

"Then, Mrs. Garfield, you stand before me an avowed and self-admitted adulteress."

The tension in the room was electrical; a death-like silence encompassed it. The Rajah and every member of the Court were still as statues.

On many previous occasions other women had stood in that room charged with the same offence, but no white woman had ever stood there as Mrs. Garfield stood. And because the penalty for admitted guilt was death, no one dared to break the silence.

The might and majesty of the British Raj was a tangible reality, and no one but the Rajah could throw off a sense of fear. Everyone was well

aware that should his participation in this unauthorised trial ever come to the knowledge of British officials, he would stand *his* trial for complicity in proceedings which an English Court would condemn as murder. And all but the Rajah willed her to deny her guilt; he, in his belief that the crime of an adulteress was greater than the crime of murder, placed his trust in fate and willed her to speak what he thought was the truth.

For what seemed an interminable time no sound broke the stillness of that room, and the silence hung as heavy as if the world were dead.

"Speak!" The Rajah's voice reverberated through the room like an echo in a vault, so loud and sharply spoken was the word, and he alone waited with an exultant expectancy for the words he felt sure she was bound to utter.

He did not require her to say "yes," for such a monosyllabic reply would not satisfy his fanatical hate. "I am guilty," were the words he waited for, and Vivienne Garfield uttered them.

The stern, compelling look on the Rajah's face immediately disappeared, and Vivienne rubbed her dazed eyes and stared helplessly around the room.

"What had happened? Had she been asleep?" She remembered nothing since she had hurled her defiance at the Court, but her eyes were suddenly drawn to the purdah opening, for the Rajah had risen and stood with eyes rivetted expectantly on that opening.

As if in response to that expectancy the purdah was drawn aside and the High Priest strode with stately steps towards the dais. Without making any obeisance he demanded to know in the name of the Goddess Kali what the King desired.

"This woman," said the Rajah, pointing to Vivienne, "has admitted the crime of adultery. What atonement shall she make?"

"O Great One, Upholder of the Faith, whose throne is the foundation of our Holy Temple, I am bid inform you that the all-knowing Kali was aware of that woman's guilt long before you of the earth suspected it. Our Goddess now decrees and orders an atonement of death."

"And what death does our Goddess ordain?"

The Rajah stood waiting with complacency for the High Priest to reply; confident that a merciful end would be decreed; for had he not prayed the night before in the Temple that the Goddess would be merciful and ordain a death which would entail no suffering? A subtle poison, he had prayed, fervently and aloud, and he had made a blood sacrifice to ensure it. And had not Kali, because His House was blessed by the gods, always heard his prayers?

But on this occasion a shock awaited him. He did not understand the subtlety of his High Priest, though he was well aware of the latter's enmity to the British Raj. It was the British Raj which had robbed the Priests of India of much of their power, and the High Priest hated every member of the ruling race with the passion of a fanatic.

“O King, Our Goddess, Kali, ordains that, insomuch as you have called that woman’s husband your brother, she be crushed to death under the feet of elephants, and her body be thrown naked and exposed to the birds of the air and the beasts of the jungle.”

This appalling sentence had a panic-like effect. The savage gloating with which the High Priest rolled out his words was not lost on the company and for once the Rajah could not remain unmoved. There was just the faintest sign of a twitch in the lines round his mouth. But his self-control was such that, after a slight pause, he turned to address Vivienne with the utmost composure.

Before, however, he could utter a word, the Diwan, bowed and bent with age, hands trembling and eyes awe-stricken, made a gesture of supplication, and without waiting for permission began to speak.

“It may not be wise, Your Highness, for one who will shortly pass into the Great Unknown to oppose the sentence we have heard. My limbs can scarce support my withered body, but I have the *wisdom* of my years, and I pray Your Highness to take time to consider . . . to . . . con . . . sid . . . er . . .”

The Diwan’s voice became inaudible. The struggle he was making to continue his speech was obvious, but although his lips moved no sound came from his throat. His face was distorted by his efforts to voice his appeal, but it was obvious his emotions were too overpowering.

For a few seconds the struggle continued, then suddenly his body began to sway, his knees gave, and he fell with hands sprawled out on the dais—dead.

The significance of such an ill omen was not lost on the High Priest and, fearful that he might be deprived of the chance of revenge for the wrongs which, he considered, his calling had suffered at the hands of the ruling race, he hastened to denounce the Diwan.

He accused the dead man of extortion, denounced him as an oppressor of the poor, a traitor to the Rajah, a friend of the English, and declared that the Gods had struck him down because he was on the point of denouncing a judgment of Kali.

The Rajah listened to his harangue, as he had witnessed the ill-omened occurrence, with perfect composure. The railings against the Diwan left him cold, but the words of the High Priest that the Diwan had been punished for daring to interfere with the judgment of Kali found an echo in his own mind; and as though no untoward circumstance had occurred he waited for the High Priest to retire, and then, sitting back on the gudda, he turned and addressed the pathetic figure of Vivienne.

“Mrs. Garfield, you have heard the sentence of our Goddess, and I have little more to say. You have admitted you are an adulteress, and on the seventh day, at the setting of the sun, you must be prepared to pay the penalty. Had you

not confessed your adultery our Goddess would not have sentenced you, but you have done well to admit it, for sooner or later your confession would have been obtained.

“The proof of your guilt is incontestable, but having admitted it you are now in our eyes guiltless, and when you have atoned you will be equally held guiltless in the eyes of the Gods. Henceforth, in so far as I am allowed, I shall be your friend. But, Mrs. Garfield, I would implore you to entertain no idea of deliverance. It is well that our Diwan has died, for it will enable our Court to go into mourning. For seven days the gates will be shut, and so the chance of anyone tracing you to the Palace is remote. Our House will be a House of mourning, and save when our late Diwan sets out on his last journey to-morrow at dawn, no one will be permitted to leave or enter.”

The appalling sentence, the sudden death of the Diwan, the excited harangue, accompanied by gesticulations, of the High Priest, held Vivienne spellbound, and she stood there wondering if she could have gone mad.

Then, feeling a light touch on her shoulder and recognising the meaning of the signal which the Rajah gave, she turned and followed her escort out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXII

VIVIENNE was conducted by the two women who constituted her escort to the top of the central staircase. There, the party turned to the left and, she found herself being led away from the zenana.

After walking some distance along a corridor they turned to the right and, traversing a broad verandah, came to an imposing staircase, at the foot of which the women halted. One of them, taking from a niche in the wall a wooden mallet, struck a gong, suspended from the ceiling, seven times at intervals of about ten seconds.

The last note of the twanging yet mellow sound had hardly died away when the large iron-strapped and studded door at the top of the staircase was opened by two hooded women garbed in black saris, and Vivienne's escort motioned her to ascend.

Mounting the stairs she found herself on the roof of the Palace, the high balustrade round which almost completely hid the world from view. Stately palms, growing out of enormous stone vases hewn from solid rock, bending and

swaying in the gentle cold weather breeze, giving the place the appearance and atmosphere of a roof garden.

In the centre stood a small building surrounded on all sides by a deep verandah. The pillars which supported the roof, like the building, itself, were, in contrast to the rest of the Palace of classic design; evidence that even the conservatism which reigns in a Rajah's Palace is not entirely proof against Western influences.

The picture which the building presented, standing on the vast flat roof of the Palace, surrounded by the waving palms and groups of tropical evergreens placed in tubs dotted here and there, was that of a miniature Roman edifice standing in a stone-paved Italian garden.

Vivienne, suffering from the reaction of her ordeal and a night of strain, halted and looked round her with an indescribable sense of peace and contentment; a feeling which even the closing of the door, and the turning of the key in the well-oiled lock, could not dispel.

Hardly had the bolts of the lock been shot, however, when the striking of the gong below assailed her ears. Seven times in succession, again at intervals of about ten seconds, the notes rang out, but this time they sounded muffled and distant; and as they died away they seemed to emphasize the quietness, as did such sounds and voices which faintly reached her now and again from below.

She felt as though she were on the top of a

lonely mountain, and the world outside, that throbbed and hummed, quarrelled and gesticulated in the manner of the East, was miles beneath her.

Bewildered and in a manner enchanted, fearing and in a way at peace, she suddenly started as the two women, advancing towards her and touching her feet, implored, in broken English, her forgiveness. Their obvious distress tended for a moment to bring her back to an appreciation of the reality of her surroundings, but the women gave no reason for their supplication and the feeling that it was all a dream returned.

They rose from their knees and one of them asked her if she would like to see her room.

In a tired, lifeless voice she agreed to the suggestion and, mounting the two steps which led to the verandah of the building, she saw that the summer house (for such it was) consisted of two spacious rooms—a bedroom and a dining room. The purdahs of the doors were thrown over their rods and the sight of those rooms with their cool, clean aspect added to the atmosphere of peace which the roof garden suggested.

“Perhaps Memsahib would like to lie down?”

Vivienne felt the need of rest and in a few minutes she found in sleep solace for her overwrought mind.

* * *

With the passing of time the unreality of Vivienne's surroundings, which had struck her from the first, appeared to become more unreal.

With no one to speak to, the silence of the place became more oppressive, Such sounds as reached her appeared more and more remote.

She saw little of her custodians. They brought her meals and attended to her other wants, but at any attempt at conversation they immediately became tongue-tied, and their only response was a vacuous, inane smile, which seemed to relegate them to the status of beings of another world.

They crept about as silently as shadows, disappearing as soon as her wants were satisfied, and appearing as if from nowhere in response to her call.

Their one pronounced appearance was made about an hour after noon when every day they would stand one on each side of the massive door which blocked the staircase leading to the verandah below. There they would remain with bowed heads, waiting for the muffled sound of the gong. At the first note they would fall on their knees and, in an attitude of prayer, recite long incantations in a tongue unknown to Vivienne.

For some time Vivienne did not notice that the number of notes was a lessening quantity. She had counted the strokes on the first day, abstractedly and without intention, but on the fourth day when she again counted, and realised that the number had been reduced to four, a little shiver of anxiety passed through her. She realised that those notes were tolling out the number of days she had to live.

She passed the next two days in a state of the utmost mental anxiety. The peace and silence began to mock her, and when, on the sixth day, only two notes rang out there was no mistaking the cold shiver that gripped her. Was it really possible that the Rajah was prepared to defy the power of the British Raj and carry out the fiendish sentence ?

Yet, in spite of her alarm, she could not throw off the impression that the whole trial was a bluff. That she was dreaming some horrible prolonged nightmare from which in time she would awaken and find herself back in Ghurumpur.

It was the grotesqueness of the sentence, its sheer, mad impossibility, which made concrete these thoughts. Yet apprehension crept into her mind. To-morrow only one muffled note would break the quiet of the place, and she thought of how she would watch the sun descending in the Heavens, reminding her that the remaining minutes of her life were passing with its slow descent.

The Palace of mourning was so silent and still that at last it appeared to her as a House of Death. She thought of the ominous message which that one note on the morrow would convey to those who heard it.

Then, as though drawn by some hidden force, she turned her face heavenwards and stood staring at the sun. She was surprised that its usually blinding rays had no effect ; even her eyelids did

not quiver. The air was still and electrical like that which often precedes an earthquake.

A coldness crept insidiously over the universe. Yet not even the faintest of breezes quivered the dagger-pointed leaves of the palms. The shadows cast by the sun turned greyer and lost their usually sharp outlines.

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, an unmistakeable haze descended like a mist, and Vivienne realised that the sun's power was waning.

A solitary crow, sailing over the balustrade with outstretched wings, glided gracefully on to the far end of the roof; a harbinger of others following in its wake. For the first time since her arrival in the Palace Vivienne was in contact with denizens of the outer world.

A score or more of these grey-hooded, black-feathered carrion of the air were soon strutting about with grotesque dignity, their heads nodding as their feet moved. Presently one of them gave vent to a loud, indignant caw-caw which seemed to have an uncanny, prophetic ring.

Then, as though in protest against this violation of the silence, her two custodians appeared on the scene and, falling on their knees, they turned towards the sinking sun. After bowing three times they threw up their hands, fingers outstretched in supplication, lowered their heads until they rested on the hard concrete roof and remained in an attitude of devotional worship, muttering hysterical prayers.

For a moment or two Vivienne remained a

silent watcher. The rays of the sun seemed as though they were penetrating smoked glass. The crows looked bewildered. Then, one by one, their wings fluttered. Giving vent to their uncanny caws they rose high in the air, circled agitatedly overhead and then, extending their wings, glided into the covering shadows of a clump of distant trees.

Vivienne, with a shudder, turned her back on those trees. There was no mistaking the coldness of the atmosphere now, and, looking up again, she saw, in the place which the sun had previously occupied, a black circle, its edges illuminated by fiery tongues of flame.

She shuddered involuntarily again. The light was as the light of twilight with night well advanced. The sun was hidden by the moon.

After a while the light gradually increased. The sun regained its bite. The crows returned to the roof and, strutting about as they had strutted before, croaked agitatedly. They appeared to be holding an indignation meeting, and swearing at some unseen power which had cheated them out of a night's rest.

As the light increased, their indignation at being so fooled was expressed in even more clamourous and evil-noted caws.

Presently the eclipse passed, the sun once more regained its full power, and there was a loud knock on the door leading to the verandah below.

Followed the sound of the shooting back of bolts. The women were opening the door, and

the Rajah entered, making a courteous salaam. Vivienne took no notice.

With a gesture which implied absolute unconcern he said, "I see, Mrs. Garfield, you bear me enmity, but you have only yourself to blame. However, I am used to being misunderstood. I have come to tell you that two very unfortunate things have happened. Your husband, who returned to Ghurumpur two days ago, has intimated that he wishes to see me on urgent, private business to-morrow. He has told me that he will be here about tea-time, which is a somewhat elastic appointment, is it not?"

Vivienne felt as though the Heavens had lifted. There was only one meaning to the Rajah's words. Her whereabouts had been traced, and he had come to hedge. The authorities were now on the track of this would-be murderer, and Vivienne determined to treat him with scorn and contempt.

"And so you come to make terms with me?" The cutting sarcasm in her voice, the challenge in her words, were met by the Rajah with a shrug of the shoulders, a shrug which Vivienne interpreted as expressive of the irony of fate.

"Mrs. Garfield, do you not know that a man in my position never makes terms with a woman in any circumstances? I have *not* come to make terms with you. I have come for a very different purpose. In some ways my plans have been thwarted. A rub of the greens, as your sportsmen would say, and it is a rub which somewhat distresses me."

The Rajah paused, arrested by her triumphant, irritating smile.

"My High Priest, at prayer last night, informed the worshippers gathered in the Temple that the Goddess Kali was determined you should die, and, as an indication that her wrath could not otherwise be appeased, she had decided to cast out the heat from the sun at two o'clock to-day; a warning that she would cast it out permanently if I did not carry out the sentence which she had imposed on you. So, as your husband is coming here about tea-time to-morrow, I have no alternative but to fix the time for the expiation of your crime at an earlier hour than originally intended. It was to tell you this that I came."

Vivienne's face blanched until even her lips lost their colour. There was something in the quiet, calm way in which the Rajah was speaking that convinced her of the inevitability of his fanatical revenge. She felt the sentence *was* a revengeful one, although she was unable to ascribe a reason for it.

"Of course, Mrs. Garfield," he continued. "I know that the eclipse of the sun is a perfectly natural phenomenon. I studied astronomy when I was at one of your universities, and the professors, to their satisfaction if not to mine, convinced me of this. But I might as well talk to the winds as try to persuade my High Priest that our Goddess Kali did not, in her wrath, produce the eclipse. For, although my High Priest is a most

learned man he is, I regret to say, somewhat fanatical."

He waited, as if expecting her to make some comment, but Vivienne was incapable of speech.

"In these circumstances, Mrs. Garfield, perhaps you can realise how very much more futile it would be for me to try to persuade my officials or my people. Whatever fear my officials have—and some of them, I regret to say, had very great fear when I pronounced sentence upon you—has been swamped by the greater fear which the Goddess Kali, through the mouth of my High Priest, has created by her threat. My people are now firmly convinced that if any leniency is shown you, nothing can avert the just anger and wrath of our all-powerful Goddess."

The Rajah paused again, while Vivienne slowly, like an awakening child, took in the full meaning of his words. He would stop at nothing to carry out his diabolical intentions!

"Mrs. Garfield, you must not judge me too harshly," he spoke as though he had read her agonising thoughts. "I have done my best to save you from a painful death. I have prayed every night in the Temple at the hour of sunset that our Goddess would relent to an extent which would permit of a more merciful end, but her anger is so incensed that she refuses to hear me. I have come to tell you this because I feel you should take such time as is now open to you to make your peace with God. Your beliefs are not mine, but God is omnipotent. Whether we

worship one God or many is simply a matter of faith. Even a woman who has committed adultery will not plead for mercy in vain if she prays to the All-Powerful with a contrite heart.

"Apart from this, I consider it a duty I owe to you to be a little more explicit with regard to my interest in your affairs.

"Your husband, at great personal risk to himself, and flouting the anger of myself, my High Priest and other powerful members of my House, not only saved the life of one who is very dear to me, but, through the aid of our Goddess, was instrumental in saving the life of my child—my only son, who will one day rule in my stead. The circumstances under which he rendered such signal services to my House would, in the first place, take up too much of your time for me to relate, and, in the second place, are quite irrelevant to the matter we are discussing.

"But, Mrs. Garfield, in return for these services, in return for the risks which Major Garfield ran, and because he is a brave man, I swore in the Temple, before the altar of sacrifice, that I would honour him as a brother. And I swore that my throne should perish and the offspring of my loins be as the offspring of an outcast if I failed to uphold your husband's honour as I would my own.

"I swore to protect him and his as I would protect my own. But, Mrs. Garfield, as an *adulteress* you are no longer his wife. You have tarnished his honour for your own selfish satis-

faction. We will meet again to-morrow, at about this hour, and then you will pass to a world where you will await your husband's coming. In that world you will know what honour is, and then you will realise how I have served you, and you will thank me for safeguarding the eternal happiness which you will obtain in your husband's love."

The Rajah's voice was restrained, but the fire of the fanatic lived in every word, and it was the stern, unrelenting eyes of a fanatic which robbed her of her power to reply.

She continued to stand there, with no other feelings than those of a human being who knows that words are of no avail; the while clinging to the hope that her husband's expected arrival might bring her relief at the eleventh hour.

Then, as though that gleam of hope had been communicated to the Rajah, he spoke again, the stern lines of his mouth belying the suavity of his tone.

"Major Garfield will not arrive here in time. I am aware of every movement he makes, and shall be kept acquainted with them, at any rate, for the present. *He* thinks, Mrs. Garfield, as everyone in the Station thinks, that you and Mr. Oldham are already on the high seas, travelling under an assumed name. I may tell you, however, that Mr. Oldham has already paid the penalty for his sin. Apparently he entered a low-class lodging house in Bombay. Why, I cannot think, but he drank himself to death with native liquor,

so they say. The owner of the house, fearing the consequences, stained his body, and in the morning he was carried out on a charpoy * and burnt at that portion of the burning ghat which is reserved for domes, sweepers and other low-caste natives. The insult, in my opinion, was well earned, huh ? ”

The conviction which the Rajah's words carried staggered Vivienne. Her affection for Oldham was dead, but the thought that he, too, had not escaped the Rajah's anger dashed the last gleam of hope from her mind.

With the Rajah's departure, and the bolting of the door behind him, she realised that her own fate was sealed.

* Native bed

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE vigil of the two women who, since the Rajah's departure, had never left Vivienne's side, was nearly over. Another hour at most and they would have to wake her and conduct her barefooted to the courtyard below.

They had had a strenuous time, for when Vivienne realised that the fanaticism of the Rajah would stop at nothing she behaved like a woman bereft of her senses, and her custodians had had the utmost difficulty in restraining the mad paroxysms of despair that constantly possessed her.

Until the Rajah's visit she could not divorce from her mind the belief that he would never dare to put into practice what he threatened ; and had reconciled herself to a confinement which she considered was a fit and proper penance, not to say punishment, for her lapse from moral grace.

It was the feeling that she was atoning for her shortcomings which was responsible for her previous stoicism ; that and the thought that, under the constant observation of those ever watchful women, it would be undignified to give

way to her feelings. These influences had forced on her an artificial calm quite foreign to her nature.

The belief that everyone in the Palace could have nothing but contempt for her acts, had instilled as deep a sense of guilt as if she had committed the adultery with which she was charged. For gradually, under the strain of her solitary confinement, the enormity of her contemplated act, appeared to her sub-normal mind more and more outrageous and immoral as day succeeded day.

But hitherto she had shown no outward sign of guilt. It was eating, unknown to anyone but herself, into her vitals. Her outward demeanour had been one of calm unconcern, and she conducted herself in a manner which unconsciously expressed her belief that the Rajah's intentions were nothing more than bluff.

This self control, this artificial calm, were instantly swept away when the knowledge burst upon her that the Rajah was in grim earnest. All thought of self condemnation was likewise swept away, and she saw herself, as she had never seen herself since Oldham's lips first touched hers, as an innocent woman. And because she had found her love for her husband, she thought of him yearning for a wife who could never return. She saw him, in her mind, sorrowing and mourning for one who no longer walked the earth. How could she leave him like this? That was the one predominating thought in her mind. He

would miss her at every turn. He would lie awake at night, murmuring her name and, in the despair of uncertainty, flog his heart.

The belief that Hugh really wanted her, really loved her, made her feel her own position more poignantly. The position of a doomed woman who was shortly to be murdered in cold blood by a stark, staring mad fanatic for a crime she had never committed. It couldn't be!

With these thoughts she would lose her self control. Alternately railing at fate, clinging with human tenacity to the remaining shreds of false hope, and overwhelmed with mental suffering, she had, for the last twenty-four hours, refused both food and drink. Sleep had not come to her distracted brain until the dawn.

Now, as the few remaining minutes of the long vigil passed with dreary monotony, Vivienne stirred, and the two women exchanged anxious, apprehensive glances. Then, as though in response to the exchange of looks, the muffled note of the gong rang out, with ominous vibration, for the last time and Vivienne sprang to her feet with terror in her eyes.

She had lain on that bed without moving for nearly seven hours, but there had been nothing refreshing in her sleep. It had been merely a lethargic trance, in which she passed from one dream to another, and the torments which her mind had suffered had left her heavy-eyed and haggard of face.

For a second or so after awaking, she failed to

realise her surroundings. Her mind to all external things was a blank and only the memory of her awful nightmares remained.

Nightmares in which her acts of the past few months, her guilt, her shame, had all been distorted with a subtlety that convinced her she had done all she had been accused of and more. Done it all with an immoral recklessness and abandon which no conscience, however hardened, could withstand.

But overhanging every thought were the dread of consequences and the pictures which had been vouchsafed to her of her after-life. Pictures of torture to which the tortures of her Bible teaching were as Heaven compared with Hell.

The note of the gong which had served to waken her had not penetrated her ears. The terror which had forced her to her feet was the outcome of a particularly nerve-racking dream.

Gradually, as she realised that she was back on earth again, the terror left her. No thought of the immediate future disturbed the relief which her awakening brought. She was only conscious that she was alive and wanted food.

One of the women immediately left to supply her wants and Vivienne, left alone with the other, suddenly remembered that she was still a prisoner. Then something snapped in her brain and, rushing at the woman with the fury of a wild beast, she dashed her to the ground.

She felt something break in her hand. It was the cord round the woman's waist from which

the key of her prison was suspended. One glance told her that the woman was unconscious, and for a second she stood there holding the dangling key, hardly realising what she had done.

The next instant escape loomed like a ray of light in her vision, and rushing swiftly to the door she inserted the key in the lock. Its bolts shot back.

She felt wildly exultant. The time for action had arrived ! She could hear her heart thumping against her side, its hammering pulsating her whole being. Her breath came in short, quick spasmodic gasps as she pulled at the door and found it giving way. Then her blood froze. She heard the footfalls of sandalled feet ascending the stairs.

She attempted to close the door but it was pushed against her with a strength greater than her own, and the next moment she was looking into the passionate, flaming eyes of the Rajah. She saw nothing else.

With a glance he took in what had happened. The unconscious woman still lay, to all appearances lifeless, on the floor.

"So Mrs. Garfield is not content until she has added murder to her other crimes."

Vivienne shrank back, cowed with fear, too stricken to comprehend the meaning of his words, too stricken to realise anything but the hate of the fanatic and, quailing before his penetrating stare, she realised the futility of trying to blot it from her vision.

Then it happened as it had happened before, her brain seemed to shrink. Those eyes seemed to come nearer, and though she knew the Rajah stood motionless, they crept nearer until they were close up against hers. Her will departed and her hands hung listlessly at her sides.

She heard someone speaking, as if far away, and in response she held out her hand and took from the hand stretched towards her something round and soft.

She put it in her mouth and greedily swallowed the powerful dose of gunjah which was to drive her mad and render her insensible to pain.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE State officials privileged to witness the final tragedy of Vivienne Garfield's life were fore-gathering in the centre balcony overlooking the arena-like courtyard of the Palace.

Entering in twos and threes, they seemed to be irresistibly drawn to the high balustrade, where they would stand for a minute of two absorbed in morbid, anxious thoughts, feasting their apprehensive eyes on the setting below.

With fascination they followed the monotonously circular procession of the eight elephants of State and noticed details which, in other circumstances, might have escaped them.

The almost naked mahouts, perched on the top of the elephants' heads, looked sullen, as though they, too, were not free from unpleasant emotions; the elaborately carved goads, with their sharp steel prongs, appeared unusually sinister. Even the elephants seemed to show signs of agitation.

The spectators, as they sensed these impressions, took in other minor details. They noticed the swaying trunks; watched first one and then

another curve upwards as the beasts snorted the air, and the smart jab from the goad which would immediately straighten them out again, when they would fall and sway lazily as before.

Finally each and every one would find his eyes drawn towards a small narrow doorway, in the high wall opposite, where a janitor stood on each side; men of fine physique, resplendent in scarlet and gold chupkuns, gold tasselled kumberbunds and headdress and armed with polished cruel-looking scimitars.

When other groups appeared on the balcony and advanced to the balustrade, the earlier arrivals would retire and take up their allotted places, conversing the while in undertones.

The balcony filled, and the buzz of conversation increased until it hummed with a medley of sounds. Gradually the voices rose to a higher pitch, as though everyone seemed bent on convincing all concerned that there was nothing uncommon in what they were about to witness: that nothing more than an act of justice was about to take place, as similar acts had taken place in the Palace of the Rajahs of Kohajulia from time immemorial.

In the balcony overlooking the high wall on the right, reserved for the wives of the Rajah and those of the highly placed officials, two women could be seen lowering the bamboo chicks which would give it purdah, and enable the occupants to see without being seen.

But in the balcony overlooking the high wall

on the left there was no sign of movement. The day had long passed when all and sundry were privileged to witness these scenes. The fear of the British Raj was now a restraining influence, and none but the most trusted servants of the State were privy to such proceedings.

In another quarter of an hour or thereabouts, when the period of mourning for the late Diwan would be over, the entrance gates of the Palace would be thrown open. And, except for the probable absence of the higher officials, Major Garfield would find things perfectly normal on his arrival, and the public apartments with their usual complement of servants.

Suddenly the buzz of conversation was arrested. The sound of a long drawn-out note from a large conch shell heralded the sound of movements on the right hand balcony. The women of the Zenana were taking up their places.

A few minutes later another long drawn-out note from the conch shell sounded and two fan bearers, arrayed in the flowing white robes of votaries of the Temple, entered the State balcony and took up their places, one on each side, but a little behind, the Seat of Justice in the centre.

A long fanfare, sounded on native horns in the room behind, notified the approach of the Rajah. Tall, upright with dignified carriage, he walked towards his seat in the centre. The newly appointed Diwan, bearing the orb of power, and the High Priest, with the sacred cobra coiled round his waist, followed. On their entry the

assembled officials fell on their knees and bowed their heads to the ground.

Like those of everyone else, the Rajah's eyes were drawn to the arena below, and he, too, for a second or so let them rest on the narrow doorway in front of him. Then turning towards the Diwan as he took the Seat of Justice he made a few jocular remarks, but the latter seemed unable to share his chief's humour, for the smile which he gave in response had a forced, artificial appearance.

Presently the Rajah addressed a few words to the High Priest and the latter, advancing to the edge of the balcony on the right of the Rajah, uncoiled the cobra and, lifting it above his head, spoke a few words in Urdu.

Instantly the elephants halted and a third note from a conch shell floated on the air. There was a flourish of goads and the elephants, dividing into two lines, backed to the wall with slow, shambling, clumsy movements. Four taking up their position on the right of the courtyard and four on the left; where they stood facing one another with the width of the courtyard between, their heads moving and trunks swaying from side to side.

The manœuvre was carried out in silence, and there were many who muttered inaudible prayers, for few in that assembly were free from fear; even the Rajah's face seemed to blanch a little. He spoke a hurried word to the Diwan who, in his turn, advanced to the edge of the balcony on the

Rajah's left, and, holding the orb of power, somewhat shakingly above his head, called on the supporters of the King to drive from the Palace the power of the evil eye.

Then followed the noise of the opening of heavy iron gates below and the subdued murmur of many lightly struck tom-toms, rolling like thunder in the distance. Louder and more rapid became the beats ; then the shrill notes of pipes joined in and for a minute or two the weird music of the East sent out a message of exhortation.

With the swelling of the music some thirty almost naked men, smeared with splashes of red and yellow paint, some wearing masks, others horns, but all with mud-matted hair, ran shouting and gesticulating into the centre of the courtyard.

The men carried a sword in each hand, which they clashed together, keeping time with the music. Jumping, turning and facing one another in mimic combat, they uttered challenges and exhortations which stimulated every human passion.

The tom-toms had now swelled to one continuous roar, and the maddened dancers jerked their bodies and gesticulated like demented animals.

Suddenly the drums ceased and the dancers finished their mad, fanatical dance in a fit of frenzy which left their bodies streaming with perspiration.

Then one by one, as though seized with mortal terror, they fled to the wall and, turning their

heads backwards with their eyes rivetted on the narrow guarded doorway, they sidled towards the iron gates, fingering the wall as they proceeded, as though attempting to scale it in an endeavour to escape from some clutching enemy.

As the last dancer disappeared, another overpowering roll of the drums was the signal for frantic clapping. The blood-hungry music, emphasized by the frenzied clamour of the dance, had not appealed in vain. There was no fear in the breasts of the spectators now. No fear! No dread!

Followed a few more words in Urdu from the Diwan, and the two janitors by the side of the narrow doorway turned inwards. A key was inserted in the lock, the door thrust open and into the gloom of the subterranean passage the janitors disappeared.

The next instant a screaming, demented, struggling white woman was dragged into the arena by two black garbed hooded women, who sought to throw her to the ground and make good their escape.

But the white woman fought with the fury of a tiger, her dishevelled hair, torn garments and blazing eyes showed the effect of the drug she had taken. Her demented, wild look as her gaze fell on the two rows of elephants had nothing in it of fear; rather was the sight of those elephants an exhortation to greater madness.

With concentrated fury she turned on her captors, clutching and pulling at their garments

with a strength of which only the gunjah-doped are capable, and so for several minutes the struggle continued.

The exasperated women, in a final attempt to free themselves returned violence with violence. They rained blows with their clenched fists on the struggling white woman, but all to no avail.

Her hands clutched the strong coarse clothes of the women with a grip which nothing but death could loosen. The savage blows that were rained upon her were incapable of inflicting pain and, holding her assailants one in each hand, she shook and flung them about as though they were dolls.

The strength of the two women was now obviously waning and it was apparent to everyone be left to them, the white woman would never that, overpowered. Neither could shake off the vice-like grip with which they were held, and an appealing cry for help was forced from their lips.

At a signal from the Rajah the two janitors rushed into the arena and stood on each side of the struggling women holding their scimitars in the air, waiting for a favourable opportunity to intervene.

Suddenly the steel blades flashed in the sunlight, the hooded women were free, and the white woman stood there gazing at her bleeding stumps, at the small, dainty hands, now lying on the ground.

In that second as she stood there, her madness held in check by confounded astonishment, the

women and janitors disappeared, and the doorway leading to the subterranean passage was closed.

For a few fleeting moments she continued to gaze at her stumps, while the dripping, scarlet blood splashed on the concrete floor of the courtyard, bespattering her bare feet. But surprise quickly disappeared and mad, foaming anger again gripped her brain.

Gesticulating wildly, waving her handless arms, she rushed in the direction of the State balcony spluttering out words of defiant hate so vehemently that they were unintelligible.

But, swiftly as she ran, she had hardly covered half the length of the courtyard when the Rajah rose and gave a hurried signal. A note had just been thrust into his hand with the information that Major Garfield's tonga was in sight.

In response to that signal eight goads descended with lightning quickness in rapid succession right and left on the elephants' heads, and under the spur of those cruelly used goads the elephants moved with incredible swiftness and hemmed her in.

But even then the white woman showed no fear. Rushing madly about the ever-narrowing circle, seeking an opening through which to escape, and still screaming out her defiant hate, she tried to beat back with her mutilated arms the huge beasts that blocked her way, but all in vain. The ever-narrowing circle rapidly closed in upon her, until the elephants were packed so close that their heads touched and then, schooled

to their work, they surged with a sidling movement.

An ear-piercing shriek rent the air. Two blood-covered arms shot up; there was the sound of tearing garments, and the cracking of bones.

* * *

The drums rolled again. The mad dancers rushed into the courtyard; one of them detaching himself from the crowd and, diving between the legs of the elephants, disappeared from view.

Once more the goads descended, the elephants backed to their former positions, and when the centre was clear a red cloth covered the spot where their feet had trampled.

The shrill notes of the pipes joined the rolling of the drums. The dancers resumed their dance, but the Rajah rose to leave the balcony; he had just been informed that Major Garfield had arrived.

As on his entry the officials made obeisance. Calmly and deliberately he acknowledged their salutations, but before passing into the room behind he turned his head and glanced towards the centre of the courtyard with a grim smile on his face.

There were dark coloured spots on the red cloth.

The dancers worked themselves into another frenzy as the officials filed out behind the Rajah, and, as the last man left, the music ceased and the dancers ran howling and shrieking like animals in

pain to the place from which they had emerged. The elephants followed and passed through the iron gates under the balcony.

The arena was empty, save for the shroud and . . . that which lay beneath it.

CHAPTER XXXV

"WELL, Major, this is an unexpected pleasure."

"In what way, Rajah?"

"In a way it is astonishing! I thought Major Garfield was too much wrapped up in his work to leave it when the plague is at its height."

"It's because of my work I've come. I want your help."

"Ah!" The Rajah gave Garfield a searching look. "I'm afraid you must be more explicit. I never make *rash* promises."

"But on one occasion you told me that you'd grant me any request?"

"Did I, Major?" The Rajah raised his eyebrows questioningly. "I think I added a reservation. But no matter. What is it you wish of me?"

"Well, we're up against a certain caste prejudice in our efforts to fight the plague. We can't get the orthodox Hindus to submit to inoculation. Incidentally, I heard the other day that the Rajah of Jolat is your brother-in-law?"

"He is——"

Garfield imagined he detected a note of relief in the Rajah's voice.

"He is the brother of the Rani you cured, Major."

"Well, Jolat's influence with the Hindus in the Bombay Presidency carries more weight in some ways than that of the British Raj. If he would ask the leaders of public opinion to meet me in his presence and hear what I have to say, and would, in the interests of human life, support me in my appeal to throw these silly prejudices to the wind, my task and that of my colleagues would be immensely simplified. I give you my word that if we can only overcome this prejudice we'll not only save many lives but stamp out the scourge within a month. I'm told that Jolat will do this at a word from you."

The Rajah held up his hand for silence.

"Do you hear that tom-tomming? It is perhaps unintelligible to you, but it is conveying a message which I do not want to miss."

The Rajah waited until the sounds ceased and then, putting his hand to his neck, fingered the holy thread.

It was Garfield's turn to raise his eyebrows in surprise. Was it by the beating of drums that the mysterious messages travelled from end to end of India?

"I am afraid, Major, I cannot accede to your request. Any interference with Jolat's religious beliefs would unquestionably be resented."

"I don't ask you to interfere with his religious

beliefs. I ask you to use your influence with him to call a meeting of the leaders of Hindu public opinion and allow me to address them."

"That I will not do."

Garfield stared. He had come prepared for long and persuasive arguments, and a flat refusal at such an early stage disconcerted him. There was no doubting the finality of the Rajah's assertion, and before he could stay himself he uttered a sarcastic, provocative challenge.

"So that's all the promise of an Indian Rajah is worth!"

"That may be." The Rajah did not raise his voice, but it was all he could do to keep from wincing at the insult. "But you have forgotten my promise. I said, Major, there was nothing, *in reason*, which you could ask that I would not grant. Are you not a good Catholic? Do you not believe that the holy Sacrament which you receive at Mass is the Body and Blood of your Saviour? Would you think it reasonable of me if I asked you to call together the leaders of your faith in order that I might endeavour to prove to them that the wafers—I put it crudely because I wish to drive my point home—contain nothing but flour and water? I know you would not agree to such a plan. Yet I perceive you still hold me in contempt. I am, of course, exceedingly sorry. But I think on one occasion when I was speaking to Mrs. Garfield I told her I was used to being misunderstood. She no doubt repeated what I said, huh?"

The Rajah knew that Vivienne Garfield had never repeated his remark ; she had never had an opportunity. But he was anxious to introduce her name into the conversation, and he looked at Garfield searchingly as he spoke.

Garfield's only response was to lower his head, and it struck the Rajah for the first time that the man had suddenly aged considerably ; beyond that there was nothing to show that he grieved, and the Rajah hastened to obliterate the effect he had produced.

"Forgive me, Major," the Rajah said sympathetically after a moment's pause, during which Garfield remained silent. "for not acceding to your request, but I know there are some things *you* would not do ; things which your honour and religion forbid, and there are some things I cannot do. But I can congratulate you, Major. I am told that you have discovered a method of casting out that particularly evil eye which produces a certain incurable disease. I do not name it because you know we believe that to mention it is to challenge the evil eye which casts it. The world acclaims you as a famous physician for your discovery ; we acclaim you as a wonderful magician, for that power was given you because our Goddess Kali, in her humility, once made you the instrument of her will."

"Then you needn't congratulate me," Garfield spoke curtly. "I want no congratulations for occult powers. I possess none."

"As you will, Major. But if I am not per-

mitted to offer you my congratulations for a medical success, you will perhaps accept them on your assumption of a title? I suppose, Major, I should be calling you the Duke d'Onzates."

Garfield was somewhat taken aback, and a smile passed over the Rajah's face at the effect of his words.

"You were not aware I knew? News travels rather quickly in India, huh?"

"I don't understand how you knew this," said Garfield blankly. "The letter informing me of my father's death only arrived this morning."

"I offer you my deep sympathy as well as my congratulations, Major. I prefer to think of you as Major Garfield, if you do not object. We have our own methods of obtaining information, and you told me something of your family history when you were attending the Rani."

Garfield looked at the Rajah with blank surprise; he was well aware that he had never mentioned his family to the Rajah or anyone else.

"I see you are somewhat sceptical, Major." The Rajah laughed gently. "But sometimes at periods of great emotion words are unnecessary. At the time I think you were very worried over what should have been a trifling affair, and you were debating in your mind whether you should continue to keep your secret from one who had a right to know it. You made a mistake, Major. A promise to a father does not come before one's duty to a wife."

Garfield was absolutely unable to believe his

ears. It seemed impossible that the man who was speaking to him could know his innermost secrets, and he began to wonder whether in a fit of mental aberration he had given expression to his thoughts, but after a little reflection he dismissed the idea as an impossibility. He had guarded his secrets too carefully and he was not a man to suffer from mental aberration. He felt inclined to pinch himself to see if he were really awake when the Rajah's voice cut into his thoughts.

"You are wondering when you told me all this. You never told me. Shall I say I just imagined it? My imagination at times is capable of very great flights. I think your father in bygone years was connected with a revolutionary movement in the South of Europe, and because he was a Spanish Grandee of great wealth, a particularly able and determined man, and exercised a very great personal magnetism, the revolution, as you well know, was within an ace of succeeding. But it failed and because of the failure his King would not allow him to return.

"Ever since then, I believe, he has lived in England in obscurity, dropping his family name of Gomeslez and assuming that of Garfield. He did this because a price was placed on his head. Naturally on his death some of these matters obtained publicity in England, and some of the information about you I have received from Jolat's son who is completing his education in England. I had a letter from him by this mail.

But much of it, shall I say, is due to my imagination."

Garfield listened to the recital spellbound. All that the Rajah said was true. Some of his information could have been obtained from the short press notices which had appeared in the English papers; other parts of it, however, were unknown to anyone but his late father and himself, and he could not help wondering whether the Rajah was a thought reader.

The Rajah rose as he made a surprising reply: "Yes, Major, sometimes. For the mind often speaks more loudly than the tongue. And now I must hasten your departure. In a few minutes my presence is required in the Temple, where I and my officials intend to pray for the mercy of the Gods on behalf of a lost soul. I must bid you farewell and . . . goodbye. Something tells me that you and I will not meet again on this earth. You, Major, would not have it otherwise. You will continue to despise a man who, you think, has failed you. You are unable to understand that my refusal falls within the reservation I made. But one day, perhaps not in this world but the next, you will realise that I have rendered you a greater service than that which you have asked. And on that day, Major, you will understand that the gratitude of an Indian nobleman is no mean or dead thing."

* * *

Garfield was glad he had refused the Rajah's offer to send him back to Ghurumpur in a State

car—the humble tonga was more in harmony with his thoughts.

It was ever the same, he thought, he would be always up against caste prejudices, the inflexibility of which is like the law of the Medes and Persians. And Indian would be ever thus, he mused, as the tonga jogged along on its return journey East is East, and West is West and there is no getting away from it.

His years of self abnegation and toil for both East and West. What had they brought him? Gratitude? No! Even the man in whose service he had risked his life would not raise a finger in the interests of humanity. . . . Fame? Yes, but what was fame to him now!

The love which men toil for, and which should have been his, had passed him by. The fruits of his labour had turned acid in his mouth.

Thoughts of this nature were passing through his mind as the tonga approached the recently erected shrine of Kali.

Out in the open field, a few yards from the pepal tree which spread its protecting branches over the red-smeared stones, a flock of vultures, gorged and distended, fought and squabbled over a carcase on which they were feeding.

As the tonga drew nearer the vultures raised their cadaverous, raw-looking heads and eyed it suspiciously, Garfield felt the bullocks reined suddenly in.

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing, Sahib. I only want to light the

lamps, and if Your Honour will pardon poor servant he would like to say a few prayers."

Garfield smiled at the tonga walla's superstition, for he knew why he had suddenly decided to light the lamps.

The tonga drew up at the roadside and the driver, descending, advanced to the foot of the pepal tree and prostrated himself in front of the red-smearred stones.

Garfield wondered why he did this in preference to praying at the newly built shrine, but it was no concern of his, he thought. They were a conservative people, these people of Hindustan. The pepal tree with its painted stones would vanish in time, but the shrine would remain for hundreds of years (the Rajah and his descendents would see to that) and in the centuries to come would command the respect and reverence which were denied it in its newness.

Musing thus Garfield stepped down from the tonga and, because he had nothing else to do, he walked in the direction of the group of vultures, filled with idle curiosity to ascertain on what they were feeding.

The sun had set, twilight was creeping over the earth, and Garfield reflected that in a few short minutes the vultures would surrender the remnants of their meal to the jackals and the pariah dogs.

On his approach the overfed, surfeited vultures lobbed, with out-stretched wings, away from him, and presently one rose in the air. Then, as

though that were the signal for a general flight the heavy, clumsy birds one after another found their wings and departed.

The jackals, prowling within range, grew more courageous, and, advancing under cover of the gathering shadows, broke into those yapping barks which merge into terror-striking, prolonged howls.

The short Indian twilight was giving place to darkness when Garfield looked down on the mangled remains of something which had once borne life, and noticed with a shudder that the well picked bones were those of a human being and . . . a woman.

No wonder the tonga walla was praying out his soul under the pepal tree! No wonder the bullocks looked wild-eyed as they sniffed the air, for the bones were broken and the skull was flattened.

And as Garfield returned to the tonga he wondered what manner of woman those broken bones had once supported; what had been her sphere of life, and why the skull was so battered and crushed.